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TWIN OAKS.

Frances Sherman Nelson
1893 Richmond Place
Mariners Harbor
Staten Island
N. Y.

BY

WHITFIELD G. HOWELL.

Cousin Sallie
Jan. 1901

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author
Whitfield G. Howell
June 10 1892.

THIS WORK IS DEDICATED

TO MY DEAR FRIEND

FANNIE STONE GARRISON,

WHITFIELD G. HOWELL.

NOR 19 FEB '36

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TWIN OAKS.

CHAPTER I.

WINCHESTER AND THE MEETING.

THE little town of Winchester is situated not far from one of our great cities. The air, fresh from off the rural hills, filled with the sweet-scented odors of the clover and new-mown hay, the rose and geranium, is wonderfully invigorating and gives color to the pale cheek of the city youth. The water, pure and cold, drawn from deep wells, needs no artificial means to give it a cooling temperature; differing greatly from the drinking fluid of the city reservoirs, which is so exposed to the heat and sun, often full of disease and drank with evil results.

The whole town itself gives positive evidence to the sojourner of the prosperity and happiness of its people. The cozy homes, though plain, are attractive, the shady streets and flagged walks, with here and there a lamp to light the way; the village square, its churches and schoolhouse, add to the interest of the place and during the summer months crowds of people flock there to rusticate for a brief period.

Is it possible to imagine anything more pleasing to the eye than a beautiful landscape and a home lovely

with the surroundings of nature? A short walk leads us to the laughing brook, murmuring its sweet encouraging song, "Although so small I am trying to do my part in this grand world, cheerfully and faithfully." It gives us a noble lesson in performing the work which God gave us to do. The house with its porticoes, turrets, numerous windows and broad veranda; the wide hall occupying the center of the house; everywhere spacious rooms in which their furnishings are so arranged as to lend a charm, unconsciously bestows a look of solid comfort, as though its occupants were anxious to impart a feeling of hospitality to all.

Oliver Oaks, the owner of this beautiful home, was a tall man of fine physique, dark hair and eyes, noble in expression, possessing an air of cheerfulness; a man of striking appearance. His wife, Carolyn, was the opposite of her husband in personal appearance; of medium height, plump, and a perfect blonde, yet having all his excellent qualities, making a very genial hostess. Their amiable dispositions and polished manners qualify them for every phase of society, and no gathering is complete in that vicinity without their presence.

About the middle of June, 1880, a wealthy New York family came to Winchester for the summer. They engaged board at the Sprague House, a fashionable boarding place just outside the village, not far from Twin Oaks. They brought with them their own horses and traps, for they were very fond of riding and driving. Farmers and townspeople prided themselves on

having smooth roads. Much time and labor were given in that direction, yet not in vain, for they won for themselves a reputation, far and near, for good roads, and this fact was one of the attractions for city people to take their abode there—particularly the Pendletons, who loved to take long drives far out in the country every day when the weather would permit.

It was the afternoon of the 4th of July that Judge Pendleton and his son were out driving, fascinated by the beautiful scenery and conversing about the many and varied lovely spots they were passing. Now and then they passed a beautiful residence almost as charming as a city home, then a quaint old farmhouse, low-roofed, and shingled siding, with the many outbuildings standing at different angles about it; the well, with the old-fashioned sweep, the old oaken bucket which is memorized in song and a favorite of all; scenes recalling the judge's own happy boyhood days, his early home on the farm, with all its pleasant recollections of mother, and father, and children. As the incidents were brought to his mind by this sight and that, he would tell his son many an episode in his boyish days, events eliciting hearty laughter as he pictured his father in such and such predicaments. They rode on over hill and dale, through the valley, viewing the productive orchards and vineyards on either side of the driveway, unconscious of the fact that it was growing late; suddenly realizing this, they turned their horses homeward speeding them along at a rapid rate.

"Our ride has been a delightful one," remarked the

judge. "It seems but a few minutes since we left our home."

"Yes," said his son, "I think this part of the country is grand, and I am more than delighted that we selected Winchester for our summer home; for my part I could remain here all the year around."

Just then they were startled by calls for help from two young ladies seated in an open carriage, who were in great danger of being dashed to the earth and killed. Their horse had taken fright as they were passing through the village square on their way home, where a crowd of men and boys were celebrating the national holiday by the firing of cannons and making a great uproar.

Young Pendleton, seeing their danger, leaped from his carriage just in time to catch the runaway by the bridle, which unfortunately excited the animal to a greater degree; the horse gave a wild plunge, reared high in the air, and with a sudden spring dashed past the young man, striking him with such force that it threw him violently to the earth. The wagon came in contact with that of the judge, and overturned, throwing both ladies out. Fortunately they received no injury more than a slight shock to their nerves. It was not so well with poor Harry Pendleton; he lay like one dead, just faintly breathing when his father reached his side. By this time a couple of men who were on the lawn at Twin Oaks, saw the accident and hastened to render assistance to their employer's daughters; finding them unhurt, they immediately turned their attention to the

young man who so bravely saved the girls' lives. Carrying him to Twin Oaks and making him as comfortable as possible, they sent a messenger to town for a physician, in the meantime endeavoring to bring him to consciousness by the usual simple restoratives, but every effort was in vain, as he seemed to be hurt inwardly.

The doctor on his arrival verified their supposition and gave strict orders for his careful removal to bed and perfect quietude. Then he applied such remedies as he had at hand to bring him to consciousness. Finding the case a more stubborn one than he at first supposed, he dispatched a servant to his office for proper medicines, and also with instructions to notify his best nurse, Mrs. Spencer, to come at once. This done, he passed into the hall where the anxious father and the family were awaiting a further diagnosis of the case. When informed of the seriousness of Harry's condition, he noticed at a glance the effect of his words. The poor father was broken-hearted, his sorrow being increased by the thought of the intense agony of the mother when told of her boy's accident. Upon Mr. and Mrs. Oaks' face was imprinted the knowledge of the young man's suffering and perhaps death, and his father's agony, all caused for the sake of their dear ones. They were full of gratitude for the sacrifice he made in saving the lives of their daughters. The girls' faces were easily read; their feelings were plainly visible. Olive, the brunette, was evidently sorry, but the grief was drowned by the satisfaction and joy of living

herself, without any scar to spoil her beauty; while little blonde Elsie took the verdict really to heart, forgetting herself entirely, and offering her services to assist in any way to help care for him.

With as great haste as possible after hearing the doctor's report, Mr. Pendleton drove over to their boarding house to inform his wife, intending to break the news to her as gently as possible, for, like most women, she became very much excited when suddenly told of an accident. But to his surprise long before he reached there the news had preceded him, throwing the whole house in an uproar. Mrs. Pendleton was overcome by the report that her husband had been thrown from his carriage and severely hurt. When she saw him coming up the driveway alone she knew in an instant it was her son who was hurt; then, too, as he drew near she could read the thoughts of his mind and heart by the expression of his countenance.

She cried out, "Is Harry killed? my darling boy! my darling boy!"

"Calm yourself, my dear," the judge replied: "he lives and is in safe hands."

Before his wife could ask any more questions, he explained the whole affair to her, which relieved her agitated mind to some extent and gave her courage to go to Twin Oaks. It took but a few moments to make the journey, and soon she was in the presence of her son, but greatly shocked on seeing his condition—unconscious and totally helpless.

The Oaks family made her feel her son would receive

every attention that lay in their power to promote his relief and comfort, and furthermore insisted that the Pendletons should send for their trunks and take up their abode with them, at least until their son's recovery was assured, as they had ample quarters to accommodate them; thus they would be in constant communication with the sick-room in case their assistance was needed. This proposition was very much against the judge and Mrs. Pendleton's wishes, on general principles, but in this case, where their own son and only child lay almost at the point of death, they could not help consenting.

The experience of the afternoon, the excitement of the doctor's coming and going, the nurse and the patient, all combined, wearied Elsie and she found it necessary to retire early. Her room adjoined the one in which Harry lay. She could hear the conversation of the physician and nurse; as they supposed she was asleep, they did not speak in whispers. Hence Elsie unluckily learned there was little hope of his recovery. This announcement made her feel greatly depressed. Although having only a few hours' acquaintance with Harry, Elsie was of a romantic turn of mind, and as their meeting had been one of such importance, the thought of his serious condition all on account of her sister and herself was enough to make a lasting impression on her mind.

The next day Dr. Gregory succeeded in bringing him to consciousness, but he was so weak he lay like one dead for days and days. Anxiety was at fever-heat.

When the crisis approached the doctor and Mrs. Spencer, the nurse, took their places by his bedside, fighting for his life all the night long; just as the morning light was breaking the doctor said: "Thank God! He will live."

After the long "tedious watching," Mrs. Spencer took a much-needed rest, and Elsie assumed charge of the patient for the morning with a thankful heart, assured that with proper care he would recover. With noiseless tread she arranged the various articles in her neat, tasteful way; the shades were adjusted in such a manner as to make the light agreeable, and then she took her place by his side. While apparently asleep, Harry in a desultory way had been conscious of her graceful movements, though too weak to make any recognition of the fact, while a feeling of rest seemed to take possession of him when she was sitting by his side. Realizing he was awake, she at once began to bathe his head, which soon had the desired effect of soothing him into a peaceful slumber.

Good nursing resulted in Harry's gradually growing better; finally, he was able to be dressed, and lay on the couch. The change made a happy household; each of the members came in to congratulate him on his returning health. Olive then made very pretty speeches to him, thanking him for what he had done, which he in turn begged her to desist from mentioning. While ill she was willing that others of the family should perform the many arduous duties of the sick-room; now, while he was convalescing, and the tasks

were lighter, she was willing to do whatever could be accomplished without any discomfort to herself. She hoped to gain his good graces, as was her way with all the gentlemen, but her coquettish arts were all lost on Harry. He answered her lightly as he considered her nature demanded, and turned with relief to give Elsie, who came in then to insist on his resting, a sweet smile.

"Well, Miss Elsie, if you will bathe my head again, I am sure I will quickly fall asleep," said he.

In her pretty, modest way she quietly assented, and Harry soon fell asleep.

His long illness had been greatly brightened by short talks with Elsie, and by her lovely manner and forgetfulness of self in the sick-room; he watched unconsciously, and longed for her comings; when she was in his presence, tranquillity assumed the place of restlessness, which helped him greatly to bear with patience his long hours of confinement.

Day after day passed in pretty much the same manner, marked by a constant gain on the part of the patient. Elsie was his principal companion. Olive would run in and out of the room, stopping long enough to say a few words, while her sister found much delight in spending hours in Harry's company. She learned from him all about his early history—how he, too, when a boy, had lived in the country away up in the old Pine Tree State. His father had been a great leader in politics in that part of the country, and was a close friend of the late James G. Blaine.

Elsie would sit and listen to Harry's reminiscences

by the hour; how he with other boys of the neighborhood would play pranks on each other and join in every phase of mischief imaginable. "They were happy days indeed, Elsie, for me, as much so as one could expect at that time of life. The college years followed, and they, too, were a happy time; though the contrast was great from the days of home life on the farm; but I must confess, looking back over my life, reviewing all its pleasant recollections, with its tastes of bitter and sweet, there has never been a time when I enjoyed life as much as now." Looking straight into her blue eyes, as her little, soft, delicate hand lay in his, she did not offer to withdraw it—she could not, she sat as one spellbound. When she could no longer stand his gaze, she dropped her eyes to the floor and sat mute and listened to the burning words of love that Harry spoke to her.

He said: "I have watched you, Elsie, closely now for weeks, until my heart beats strangely when you are absent. God was good to send me out that day and just at the right time to save you from what might have been a terrible death."

"Oh, Harry! please, please do not mention that awful accident; it makes me shudder to think how near you came being killed, and all for Olive and me."

"Hush! my darling. The sacrifice I made to save your lives has long since been repaid by the kindness which you have shown to me, in your faithfulness and tender care while I was sick. I appreciate it all so much. You have made me love you; can you give me

one little bit of your true affection, one throb of your heart's love, that my cup of happiness may be full?"

With these words he buried his face in his hands and wept like a child.

The scalding tears were coursing down Elsie's cheeks, while her heart beat wildly against her breast, her breath came quick and fast, and with the hot blood streaming through her veins, which brought a deep flush to her countenance, she bent her head over until it came almost within touch of his, and whispered softly but sweetly in his ear:

"Yes, my darling—in the few weeks which you have been our patient and guest, I have learned to love you deeply, and every word which you have said to me, every thought which I have read in your beautiful eyes, is all reciprocated by me. Yes, I give you my heart; not one little bit, but all, my darling, all my love, my life."

Harry quickly raised his head and caught Elsie in his arms and with deep affection, a love that knew no bounds, he gazed long and steadily into those eyes of blue and pressed upon her warm, ripe lips many burning kisses.

CHAPTER II.

A COQUETTE.

OLIVE OAKS from childhood had been a mystery. While her life had been somewhat of an open book to her parents and friends, yet there were many pages in that book where you could not read between the lines. She differed greatly from other girls of the neighborhood. She would laugh at times, perhaps when they failed to see the object which amused her, and when they would be at the height of some enjoyment, she evidently was unconscious of the fact, as her face would wear an expression of perfect indifference. She was so at home and at school. When in company, there was sometimes a coldness in her manner that would make one a trifle uncomfortable to say the least. Yet she was sought after on every hand because of her fascinating qualities.

All through her schooldays to one she seemed the most perfect girl in all the world. He walked by her side at the age of ten and twelve; at fifteen was her escort now and then from various gatherings in the vicinity, which are so usual in small country places. To be sure, they had their little petty quarrels, which lasted only for a brief season, and then they were even *more* friendly than ever, if possible. They would

gather wild flowers together and twine them into wreaths and carry them home as souvenirs of their day's pleasure, and while the little flowers and leaves were wreathed into garlands their love toward each other was woven into a circle of pledges and vows, which he hoped would be abiding and last through the storms of life, which will surely come to every one of us poor mortals. So, at the age of eighteen, Olive was the promised wife of Guy Hills.

The years of courtship had at last culminated in an engagement, which had been announced just previous to the opening of our story.

Guy, her lover, was a modest young man about her own age, one of those creatures who is easily led by a stronger mind; he had no self-will, not much decision of character, and very little perseverance; yet in appearance he was all that could be desired. Born of very respectable parents, in good circumstances, he generally made a good impression. He was of medium height and quite dark, like Olive, with rather a dull expression, without her laughing eyes. She had darker eyes and hair and was beautiful in form and appearance.

Thus they had chosen each other for better or for worse, despite the warnings wiser neighbors had given him, on account of her disposition to flirt, and her, on account of his lack of ambition.

Guy had let his life go on and on in that direction, fascinated by those dark, beautiful eyes, which some had prophesied would cause him sorrow. Her saucy

smile completely captivated him; her exquisite, well-moulded form he watched closely; giving expression to his delight for her by gazing into her pretty face, and telling her, though not in words, of his deep love for her. Whether she appreciated the fact or not, he never once thought, because she so charmed him he was lost to all else but his own thoughts.

'Tis an old and true saying, "Love is blind."

Guy could not see any fault in Olive, for she appeared to reciprocate (at least, he thought she did, if she did not), his devotion to her; yet by an outsider it could be seen that there was some neglect on her part, particularly when other young men were near by. Strange as it may seem he never grew jealous. Of easy disposition and full of trust, he yet had to discover the first cause for jealousy. She was sly enough not to give him any opportunity for mistrusting her and to him seemed to give all attention, yet managed to have an eye single to every glance which was given her, and they were many, for her personal appearance was very inviting. She, like most young girls, craved much attention, was very susceptible to the flattering words of the male admirer, and a very willing listener, though at times she could be cool and reticent. Her laugh was full of music, her voice soft and sweet, her eyes glistened with brightness, and when she became silent and changed her expression, it was only for the moment and acted as a quietus; but soon she would again be herself and that quick turn in her character would forestall any opinion one might form against her disposition.

Withal, she was thought much of by the neighbors, and made many acquaintances each summer from among the city visitors who came to Winchester, who sought her society as much as possible, like her own towns-people, they seemed to enjoy her many social qualities.

Guy's routine of everyday life did not vary much from the usual country way; he lived at home on the farm, though he did not succeed in doing much work.

His father had a large fruit place, cultivated grapes to a great extent, and also other small fruits, which realized for him a handsome profit.

Guy's ambition was somewhat limited. Through his early youth and young manhood he attended school, and during vacation time sought pleasure such as the country afforded, which seemed to be all he desired.

It was in the latter part of July in the year of the opening of our story, late in the afternoon, that Guy called at Twin Oaks for Olive to accompany him to the village. He wished to transact some business there with a man by name of Sargent, an old resident of the place, who was very odd in his manner, a sort of a religious character; not that he wanted to be heard for his much speaking, but he quoted Scripture from morn till night, almost at the beginning and ending of every sentence. He had the Bible at his tongue's end, sometimes his quotations were correct and again they were not. As Guy drove into his yard he said:

"Good-evening, Mr. Sargent. I came down to fix up those papers and brought Olive along as a witness. I hope we find you well."

"Ah, ha! my boy, the Lord is my strength and song and is become my salvation; Psalm cxvi., verse xiv.; yes, I am feeling good; and how is Miss Olive?"

She gave one of her sweet smiles and replied: "One could not but help being in good spirits when looking in your face, Mr. Sargent, for you always seem so happy and joyous that you bring sunshine into the life of others."

"Oh! thank you, Olive, a merry heart maketh a cheerful countenance, but by sorrow of the heart the spirit is broken. Prob. xv., verse xiii.

"I see you don't lose any of your familiarity with the Bible," said Guy to him. "How do you remember the location of every passage? I have taken particular pains, Mr. Sargent, to look up the chapter at different times when I have heard you quote Scripture and almost invariably find you correct."

"Well, you see I was always fond of the Word, and from my childhood have studied it closely. My father and mother led most exemplary, Christian lives, and their example I have tried to follow day by day, taking the word of God for my guide, until now I am familiar with it and have it at my command."

"True enough, Mr. Sargent, you have, and from my boyhood I can always remember you as giving good advice, and when you are gone the people of Winchester will have lost one whose place cannot be easily filled."

"I am growing old, Guy; soon my voice will be hushed, my eye that still is bright will be dim, my

steps will be tottering and my tongue silent in death. I will have gone to the land whither we are all bound; for all go unto one place, all are of the dust and all turn to dust again. Ecc. iii., verse xx."

How much more he would have said in that line it is hard to tell, if he had not been interrupted by some one who came in at his front gate, and as he came up the path the apparent stranger called out: "Hello, uncle!" to Mr. Sargent. The young man took his uncle so by surprise that for a wonder he did not quote a verse of Scripture, but said:

"Why, my dear Chadwick, how glad I am to see you; let me introduce you to my friends. Mr. Hills, my nephew, Mr. Chadwick, and Miss Oaks."

After a few words of greeting, they all went on the porch and entered into pleasant conversation for some little time. Presently Guy and Mr. Sargent excused themselves to transact some business matter and left Olive alone to entertain the stranger.

It was not one bit embarrassing for Olive to converse with Mr. Chadwick; it was rather a pleasure for her, for she had found him a man of ready wit in the few moments' conversation that they had when all together on the porch, and she saw, too, that he was not ill at ease in his present situation, but rather seemed to enjoy the fact that his uncle was called away just at that time. He in turn could see by the pretty flush on her face that she reciprocated his feelings without the slightest degree of hesitancy. It did not take him long to decide that Olive had beautiful eyes and an attractive

face, and was very winning in her way, so with this favorable impression toward each other they spent a very pleasant half-hour and became quite interested, hardly realizing the return of Guy and his uncle, who came back upon the porch and were seated before they were aware of it.

Conversation was again resumed by all, until Guy took his departure. As he and Olive drove away she gave a backward glance at Mr. Chadwick and made an inaudible remark, by motion of her lips, which he fully understood, but which was apparently not noticed by Guy, as he was engaged in reining up his horse, to keep from running into a post.

The next day Olive went down to the village bright and early, decidedly a new feature for her; for though the Oaks family were practical people and rose moderately early, yet it had been the custom of the girls to delay their rising hour as late as possible.

It was an exceedingly sultry morning and she dressed in harmony with the temperature, which at 9 o'clock was fully ninety degrees. She wore a pink chambray gown, trimmed elaborately with hamburg of the same color, which added to her beauty. She visited one store and another and was about to enter the post-office, when suddenly she met Mr. Chadwick coming out.

"Why, Miss Oaks, I am delighted to see you, indeed; it is an unexpected pleasure at this hour of the morning," said he.

Olive thanked him and made some little remark, but

seemed somewhat confused at meeting him just then, and acted rather indifferently at first, but soon her expression changed and her face grew animated and bright with a happy smile, a smile which no one could resist. Her eyes gazed into his, her face became rosy with blushes, her voice sweet and low, as they conversed about one topic and another; as Mr. Chadwick stood and watched her pretty face, he was fascinated beyond expression. He remembered her from the evening before as a charming young lady; but when he saw her in the broad glare of the morning light, her face diffused with pretty blushes, resembling colors of dewdrops glistening in the brightness of the sun, to say he was charmed would but faintly express his feelings.

They walked slowly from the village toward Twin Oaks; Mr. Chadwick did not ask the privilege, nor did Olive show by her manner that his escort was not ageeable, but quite to the contrary she seemed so pleasant to him that he assumed that he must accompany her home, apparently unconscious of the fact that having only met each other the evening before that it might be improper to do so. He was only too happy that the opportunity afforded itself. At the gateway of Twin Oaks they parted, after he had exacted a promise from Olive that she would come down to Winchester again the next morning; then they would go for a walk on the hills, away from the village center, where the breezes blew through the treetops and the smell of the pines and hemlocks gave a delightful odor and where nature in all her beauty would be their only companion.

The day dragged slowly by for Mr. Chadwick. Reminiscences of the morning dwelt in his mind continually. The very ground upon which he walked in and around the village was almost hallowed to him, enchanting him, for it was the place where he first met Olive just the day before, never dreaming in that little country town there was one so fair and lovely, who could cast such an influence over him in so short a time. He had visited his uncle, Mr. Sargent, a number of times, but somehow had never met Olive, though he heard of her beauty and fascination, and furthermore knew she was the promised wife of Guy Hills; but now this made no difference to him; he was for himself in this world, for his own happiness and comfort. When he once set his mind to carry out any scheme, accomplish it he would, regardless of any cost or sacrifice.

Olive reasoned with her conscience all the day, to excuse herself from what might have been imprudence in listening to the words of love that Mr. Chadwick had spoken to her; but each protestation of her conscience would be offset by a rebuke, from the inclination of her disposition to lend her heart and ear to the melodious voice of her new friend. She had never been an avowed flirt, although she loved to meet new faces, but among all those she ever met none had so completely fascinated her, had set her heart into such a flutter of excitement as Mr. Chadwick.

When Guy called in the evening, he found Olive unusually quiet, although she was generally so lively and gay. Her mind seemed to wander away into a

dreamy atmosphere, her eyes would stare into vacancy, nor half of the conversation did she hear or respond to. When Guy talked on and on about their approaching wedding, which was soon to take place, she answered in monosyllables, no and yes, and sometimes not at all. He grew vexed at her indifference and chided her; but when she looked into his anxious face all his fear and uneasiness were swept away in the twinkling of an eye by the very sweet smile which she gave in answer to his question, and his doubting heart at once was set at rest. She could accomplish so much with one of her bright smiles. As "a soft answer turneth away wrath," so does a winsome smile melt away grave doubts and fears. Guy did not know just why she seemed cool to him, or failed to converse with him as freely as usual, yet he knew something was on her heart and mind. He tried to learn what it was, but did not succeed then. She seemed half-inclined to open her heart and tell him her feelings when he urged so hard to know why sho was so pensive and grave, when in so short a time their wedding day would occur, but she did not; she succeeded rather in chasing away after awhile her quietness into laughter and conversation; so before they parted that evening he was satisfied that her heart was fully his, and all the years of waiting—waiting for her to grow from childhood to womanhood—and for the time to claim her as his bride was now near at hand.

The morning of an eventful day dawned. Two hearts were anxious for its coming. Olive rose early.

Hastening to her window she looked out toward the western sky and studied the forecast of the day. How happy she was to see the horizon bright and fair in the prospect of a joyous time with Mr. Chadwick. She dressed herself with exquisite care, arranged her dark, beautiful hair in the most becoming manner and taste. As she stood before her mirror, she soliloquized thus: "What would Guy say if he knew how rapidly my heart beats, how excited I am, and if he could see the bright flush on my face and know the cause! not he! not he! Oh! what deception I am practicing! I'll stay at home; I won't go. I won't deceive him so; I won't! I won't!" and she stamped her little foot on the floor and sat down on a chair nearby, picked up a book and tried to read. She glanced over a whole page before she was conscious of the fact that she did not know one word she was reading. A haze came over her eyes, it grew dark, she could not see for a moment, blinded by a nervous excitement which came over her. Her motive to do wrong struggled with her motive to do right —neither prevailed for the time being, but both overcame her and left her in a flood of tears.

After a weary day, and a much more restless night, Mr. Chadwick arose in answer to the bell quite early, as his uncle's people were early risers. From the time he left Olive the morning before, she had not been out of his mind. It had been a difficult matter to sleep, because of his unsettled state. He knew Olive ought not to meet him that morning, yet fully expected she would. When he gazed out upon nature from the

broad piazza, as he walked around the beautiful yard, the perfume of the flowers brought to him a consciousness of the fact that outside all was lovely, while within his heart was troubled. He knew Olive ought not to meet him, and that he ought not to meet her; for he too had a conscience which upbraided him and entreated him not to swerve from the right; for from Olive's own lips he had again heard the story of her approaching marriage to Guy. If he interfered what might the consequences be? With these thoughts burning in his mind, he resolved there and then he would not meet her. But no sooner had he decided to break the engagement than he saw before him in a vision the lovely form of Olive, with those beautiful eyes of deep brown—her soft, wavy hair of black, her tiny foot, and delicate hand; though only a recent vision—it was reality to him, and overpowered his better intentions. His selfish nature was paramount, and he quickly decided to go and meet her at all hazards.

CHAPTER III.

THE GUESTS.

THE Pendletons were made to feel welcome at Twin Oaks, the hospitality displayed to them by members of the household was very generous. It was so kind to invite them there, where their presence would influence the sick and, together with other remedies applied, hasten the recovery of their only child.

There was a decided difference between this home and the Sprague House, where so many people were gathered under one roof, so much excitement was going on continually. In this peaceful, happy home, surrounded by every comfort, they were able to meditate and enjoy a rest from business and social care. When they were assured of Harry's recovery they were in a happy state of enjoyment; so encouraged by the daily improvement of the patient that they put aside the sad fact which so suddenly and unexpectedly made them guests of this home, and entered into every phase of pleasure which time and opportunity afforded.

Judge Pendleton was more than fifty, with a full beard already tinged with gray. In manner he was kind, loving, and extremely tender-hearted, and showed much affection toward his wife and son. Brought up in the country himself, he appreciated that life. It was

more congenial to him than the city, with its hot and narrow streets and pent-up homes; even the large brownstone houses were not to be desired, in comparison with the commodious and attractive home which the Oaks possessed. His old home, up in Maine, on the farm, was a delightful spot to spend a portion of the year in. It was there he was born and raised; there the first principles of true Americanism were instilled into his youthful brain; there he learned to be faithful over a few things. Born of good old sturdy stock, he was taught to be true as steel from his early childhood. In the old brown schoolhouse close by the roadside he met his first love in short dresses and ginghams; to and from school they walked together; grew up side by side, almost, and early in life were married. The same sweet-faced child who was the companion of his boyhood days was still his companion, and the fond mother of the noble son.

The judge had a large and lucrative law practice in the city of Boston, which required the most of his time a greater part of the year. His son Harry was a partner, and the old familiar sign displayed both names.

It had been the custom of years for the judge and family to go to Maine for their vacation. This year, by the advice of a friend who knew the country well, he was persuaded to try Winchester; it was recommended to him for beautiful scenery, good roads, pure air and the refined tastes of its inhabitants, all of which characteristics in the short time of his sojourn there had surpassed his expectations.

Mrs. Pendleton, like her husabnd, was fond of the country; she enjoyed what he enjoyed, not merely from the influence which he had over her, but from her nature, which possessed like qualities; nowhere in the domain of God's earth could she have been better pleased than at Twin Oaks. The home answered her every requirement, flowers, trees, lawn and shrubbery in abundance. Most women born and brought up in the country love these things; while they may be beautified by man, yet God is in them all, His glory is manifested in every surrounding beauty. The perfume of the flowers is from the Divine; the changing colors and the combination are His handiwork. The foliage so wonderfully wrought, the many millions of leaves—no two alike—are full of His glory; they speak of Him through the gentle breezes which waft them to and fro—silent witnesses beautiful to behold.

Mrs. Pendleton, during the days of Harry's convalescence, roamed around the grounds, not always alone, sometimes accompanied by her husband, then again by Mrs. Oaks or Olive, enjoying the many beautiful attractions which its owner had so generously added to his home from time to time, to make it complete in every way.

The accident which had brought their son into acquaintance with the family, and had made him to lose his heart during his recovery, was in no way displeasing to them. They never in all their experience had seen such devotion in so short a time as was exhibited between Elsie and Harry. The family in general real-

ized it was the wish of the two to be by themselves as much as possible. The Pendletons had learned enough of Elsie to know that she was a sweet, lovely girl, one to be greatly appreciated, and they considered their son very fortunate indeed in winning her heart and hand. They were proud of the fact that some day they would call her daughter, for to them she seemed to possess all the gracious qualities that man could look for in woman.

The judge and Mr. Oaks had become fast friends in their daily association, and when he mentioned the fact of returning to the Sprague House, as their son was well on the way to recovery, Mr. Oaks would not hear to his suggestion, and was so positive in his invitation and hospitality, that the judge promised to remain as his guest as long as he stayed in the country.

The extraordinary circumstances which brought them all together were the foundation of an acquaintance which proved to be full of exciting romance and many strange experiences; bringing much happiness and sunshine, pain and bitter sorrow, to each and every member of these two families.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SNAKE IN THE GRASS.

ELSIE OAKS was a twin sister of Olive, and a decided blonde. Her hair was a golden shade, her eyes blue as the heavens, her form like that of her sister, very shapely, her contour of person well rounded, and she bore herself with much dignity and sweetness. She would meet you with perfect ease in conversation, no stiffness in her manner, while diguified, yet not arrogant, and it was not a difficult matter to be fascinated with her, as young Pendleton found, for day by day she entwined herself in his heart's affection, until we find them pledged already as lovers after a short acquaintance of three weeks. The growing sentiment between them was plainly visible to every member of the Oaks household, and the fact seemed to create no astonishment.

It was Elsie's first love, first real love. Though she had many close friends in the neighborhood, yet there was no one who could lay claim to her affection more than another. She was free and independent in regard to love affairs. So when Harry came across her pathway through the medium of the accident, her life seemed to take on a new form of existence at once; she thought she owed her life to this dear fellow, and there

was but one way to repay him, and that was the way her heart inclined from the first of her acquaintance with him.

After Harry had fully recovered, he remained some time at Twin Oaks, his inclination to depart and go hence came slowly; the home surroundings and all were so pleasant and agreeable that to one of his susceptibility, he found it a difficult matter to leave the place where his affection had become so fastened by the wonderful devotion that Elsie had given him. She was such a bright companion, so full of merriment; somehow he had never met such a lovely girl; he felt he would like to tell the fact to all the world. He was proud of her acquaintance, and happy in her love, and why not? For, like her sister Olive, she was beautiful to behold, and the very picture of health. Living in a country where the air was pure and wholesome, outdoor life much of the time during the season gave her strong lungs and imparted health and vigor to her whole system.

Foolishly he must go and write to one of his city friends about Elsie, telling him how when one day out riding he saw a runaway coming up the road at full speed; in his endeavor to stop the horse, he received severe injuries and was carried into the home of the two lovely ladies who were in the carriage, and how he had fallen in love with one of them. "I have read of gentle women, women possessed of warm affection, and all the loving qualities of the gentle sex, but I never before have met one who has every gift of purity and a heart

of devotion. There is no one like my Elsie, and I want you, Roy, to see her. I have told her of you, and I am privileged to invite you here next week; you then may see for yourself that what I have written is all true. Do write and say you will come. Aside from this lovely girl, the home is beautiful. The scenery around Twin Oaks and the village of Winchester cannot be surpassed anywhere. The air is equal to mountain air, for there are many high hills in all directions, full of pines and hemlocks, and the breezes blowing through them render a rich perfume, and make the air bracing and sweetly scented; I know you need a rest, shut up in your office all the week. It will do you a power of good to make the change."

Roy Wallis did not need a second invitation. He packed his grip and caught the first train out of the city for Winchester, to see his friend and meet the pretty girl as well. While the train is carrying him along at a rapid rate toward his destination, we will introduce the reader to him.

He was no lad, he stood six feet in height, and weighed considerably more than two hundred pounds, was broad-shouldered, had an expansive chest, a very commanding appearance, and a manner which naturally drew friends around him. Although of such fine exterior, his nature within was dwarfed to a considerable extent; his experience with the world taught him how to put his best foot forward, and to keep that part of his nature which was base hidden from even his dearest friends; so that Harry unconsciously was paving the

way for great unhappiness for both himself and Elsie by inviting Roy to see her, as he was very susceptible to the charms of pretty women, and when once fascinated by them, put forth every energy to win the object of his affection, either by fair means or by foul, and when once gained, this object was soon forgotten and cast aside. Already in the years of his life he had had a wide experience which was unknown to Harry; if it had been, their friendship would long ago have been broken, but he seemed to have a faculty of getting out of his scrapes about as easily as he got into them, never bringing any disgrace upon himself or having any apparent publicity in the matter. He was so polished in his manners that he gave one the impression that he was a perfect gentleman; yet he had a nature much like a serpent—deceitful. He would charm his victim into submission, then coil himself around the weaker nature, thereby gaining his point. He was a good friend and a bad enemy, full of love and full of hate.

Harry had known him in business relations, and to some extent socially, yet not intimately, and had learned to think much of him; but just what prompted him to write and tell of Elsie, he never knew; he felt he must tell some one of his friends, his heart was overflowing with love for her, and singularly enough the human heart cannot hide either joy or sorrow—it will break out and show itself either in words, or through the countenance. He wanted Roy to come and see the object of his choice, that he might go and tell it to others of his friends, that they might share his joy in that way, not

supposing for a moment in writing him that he was inviting a friend, who would in the end prove himself the mostbitter enemy.

The stage drove up to the gateway at Twin Oaks one day in the latter part of the month of August, a little more than six weeks from the time that Harry had met with the accident, a man alighted, carrying a grip, an umbrella, and a cane. He was dressed in the height of fashion, and resembled one accustomed to wealth and refinement. He tripped lightly up the gravel walk to the house, and reaching the front door, gave the bell a vigorous pull. The door was quickly opened by Olive, as she was on her way out when the gong sounded through the hall. There she stood face to face with a stranger. With a very low bow he said: "I beg your pardon, madam. I am in search of a friend, Mr. Pendleton; my name is Wallis," handing her his card.

"Ah, yes, Mr. Wallis. Why, indeed, we feel that we know you already, Mr. Pendleton has spoken of you so often, I am sure he will be happy to see you. We welcome you as his friend; please walk in and I will call him; he is out on the lawn with my sister."

"Oh! don't disturb him, let me go to him."

"Very well, as you wish, and you will kindly excuse me, as I have an engagement for a short time," said Olive, as she led the way to the lawn. He bowed very politely, and thanking her for her kindness, she moved in the opposite direction, and he made his way to where Harry and Elsie were seated.

"By George!" said he to himself in an undertone,

"she is about the handsomest woman I ever laid eyes on. What a form! Well, well! I don't care much for brunettes, but she will do. I never saw such eyes. I wish she was a blonde."

Harry heard footsteps, jumped to his feet and turned partly around when he caught sight of his friend.

"Why, Wallis, old boy! how do you do? I just received your letter a short time ago, saying you would be here to-morrow. Allow me to present you to my friend, Miss Oaks, Mr. Wallis."

Elsie gave him a cordial greeting and remarked that they had just been planning how they would go down to the train to meet him, but he had surprised them by coming a day ahead.

Roy explained to them he found he could get ready for his trip sooner than he at first expected, and as he thought he would not experience any difficulty in finding the place, had sent no word.

After a short conversation, Roy was shown to his room, as he felt he needed a change of apparel after his dusty ride on the cars. While in his room you should have heard his soliloquy, expressing his thoughts as he first gazed upon the fair face of Elsie. He had hardly recovered yet from his introduction to Olive; flashing through his mind were visions of the dark-eyed beauty, her enchanting words, which to him seemed like the soft strains of sweet music floating on the air. Scarcely had the sound of her voice died out when he came face to face with another, who far surpassed Olive in his mind, for his ideal of beauty was just her type.

Elsie never looked prettier in her life than that afternoon, with her golden hair in soft waves, covering her shapely head, and eyes to match the sky in its ethereal blue. He had met in other days many charming blondes, both in this and foreign countries; but the expression upon the innocent face of Elsie so far excelled all others that he was lost in trying to find words to express his thoughts of her beauty.

"I wish it had been myself instead of Pendleton who had run against this precious bit of luck; fortune does not seem to smile upon me anyhow, as it does upon him; yes, fortune, I would consider it such even to be thrown down upon the hard ground and trampled upon by horses, if I could be brought into a home like this to recuperate."

He gazed around the room at the homelike appearance of its furnishings, and out of the window upon the lawn toward the west as the sun shone bright and threw its rays over the hilly country, shedding fancy streaks upon the closely cut grass from the many colored leaves that were glittering in the sunlight of that charming afternoon.

"What a home this must be! By the little I have seen of it and its occupants, I am completely charmed, and how unfortunate it is, that Pendleton did not fall in love with the brunette and leave the blonde for me; but I'll take care of that. Roy Wallis understands himself pretty thoroughly; I never had just the feeling for any woman before that I have already for this fair daughter of Twin Oaks. Love at first sight, yes, true

enough, I have been in love before many times, but there is something in my heart and mind which has come to stay. I am sure of it. Yes, not two hours here, but my heart is lost, I will go forth and see what an adept in love affairs can accomplish."

As he completed his toilet the bell rang for supper, and he made his way to the hall below, where he met his friend Pendleton, who introduced him to the other members of the family; but to Judge Pendleton and wife he needed no introduction, as quite frequently he had visited their home in the city.

At the table Roy was the most affable person imaginable. Seated to the left of Elsie and to the right of the judge, and opposite Olive, his position was fortunate for him, as it gave him an opportunity to study the character of Elsie more closely, as he made it a point to address the most of his conversation to her. There was a determination in his mind to win her if possible, by fair means or by foul. While he was very agreeable to the other members of the family circle, his best smiles and most direct glances were given to Elsie. Though no one around the table was conscious of the fact, not even herself; possibly she noticed she received the most attention from him, which she attributed to the fact that Harry and he were friends, and he was inclined to show her much attention for his sake.

After the supper was over they all repaired to the porch, the men to smoke, the ladies to chat and all to enjoy the evening together.

"What a delightful place this is, judge," said Roy.

"I am charmed with the scenery about here, with the mountains lying off yonder so grand."

"Ha! ha! ha! Roy," he replied, "you don't know as much about the country as I do—they are not mountains, only high hills; yes, it is the most beautiful spot on earth to us. Mrs. Pendleton and myself contemplate locating somewhere in this vicinity."

"Oh! so you have decided to live among us, judge?" broke in Olive, "I am so glad."

"Do you intend to buy or build?" said Roy.

"That depends on whether Mr. Oaks will sell me some ground adjoining his lawn to the south."

Then said Elsie, "Papa would be only too happy to have you for near neighbors, and I guess you can buy land of him at a very small figure."

"Yes," spoke up Mr. Oaks, "I will give you a fine plot if you will build upon it."

"Oh! no. I guess not; I hardly think we could permanently reside here, I was only joking about the matter, I wish it was the truth. You see I could not leave my law practice except for a short term during the year; though I greatly appreciate your offer. I am at present unable to accept it much as I would like to do so."

"You are real mean, judge," said Olive, "to excite my hopes so and make me believe you were going to locate here and then contradicting it; Elsie, too, will be deeply disappointed," and she gave a sly twinkle with her eyes in the direction where the lovers sat. As they caught the remark they looked at each other and a smile of happiness passed over their faces, which was

offset by a dark frown upon the countenance of their visitor, for he could plainly see what devotion there was between the two, and it made his work of gaining her all the more difficult.

Thus the conversation went on from one to another during the evening, until they became quite well acquainted with Roy, for he was so very gentlemanly in his manner that one could not but feel drawn toward him by his easy conversation and the knowledge he possessed upon the subjects of the day. He was in close touch with the political and financial world, as well as the topics which were more familiar with his new friends, literary culture, and the domestic affairs of a country home.

The next morning was fair and bright, one of those perfect, cool, early fall mornings in the country, for already it was that time of the year when the heat of the summer had begun to wane. The leaves were just slightly tinged with their autumnal color, and all nature was in the dawn of her beauty. Roy walked out upon the lawn and viewed the fair face of God's nature; as he did so he felt a strange feeling come over him. While his outward expression might have looked calm and peaceful, his heart within beat with unusual emotion, for his brain was working to win the heart of Elsie.

"Why, Miss Oaks, I was not aware you rose so early," said Roy to Elsie, as he met her by one of the large flower beds on the lawn, where she was gathering roses for her hair and flowers for the table decoration.

"Why, certainly, Mr. Wallis, we country people do not sleep late like you city folks. The early morning air here is so invigorating that I make an effort often to breathe it, although Olive and I find it a difficult matter sometimes to rise early. I am likewise surprised that you are up so early."

"Well, Miss Oaks, there are many things here to charm me. In the few hours of my acquaintance with your pretty home, I have become infatuated, not alone with the place and its surroundings, I assure you, but with its occupants." And he looked straight into her blue eyes as he spoke those words. She showed her appreciation of his remarks by the color which came to her cheeks. As it came and went the most perfect pink flush seemed to permanently rest there, which in the early morning made her beautiful to behold, and added a greater desire to his infatuation.

"I am glad to know you are so pleased with Twin Oaks, and hope your visit here will be a benefit to you, as well as a pleasure to us all."

"I am not seeking for health, Miss Oaks, but pleasure only in this case. Harry spoke of you in his letter in such glowing terms, and in such words of praise, that I came prepared to meet a charming young lady, and I must say my expectations have been surpassed by far."

"I am not susceptible to flattery, Mr. Wallis. I assure you I don't care for it, except, of course, from Harry, and if you continue in that strain, I shall be compelled to change the opinion I had formed of you."

He gave a little laugh and remarked:

"I had no intention of speaking other than as I felt."

"Well, then, Mr. Wallis, you should not have expressed yourself in that manner to me."

Just then Harry came out of the front door and saluted them with a "Good-morning. Why, Roy, you up already taking in the early air?"

"Yes, Harry, I find it very exhilarating out here, much better than it would be inside; besides I have been enjoying the company of Miss Oaks."

Elsie looked up from gathering flowers and smiled sweetly at Harry, as though indeed the unexpected chat she had with Roy had been very enjoyable to her; she did not wish to let Harry see by her countenance how indignant she felt at the presuming remarks of his friend, so forced an unusually pleasant smile, though it was a difficult matter for her to be other than herself at any time.

The three walked around the yard, viewing the flowers while the dew was yet upon them and their beauty and fragrance was still fresh, before the warm rays of the sun would close up many of them, making them less attractive, and their ordor less perceptible.

The exertion of the afternoon previous, and the long chat which they all had out on the porch in the evening, seemed to prove a slight injury to Harry's health. He did not feel like joining the party who were to go driving that morning. Guy and Olive, Elsie, Roy, and himself, were to drive out a few miles north of Winchester to a lake, which was really a summer resort, though the season was well over, for it practically ends

September 1st. Yet a few lingered to enjoy the privileges which the place afforded. There was good boating and fishing there. It was considered good sport to haul in the beauties. The lake abounded with black bass and pickerel, which even at that period of the year it was not a difficult matter to catch, particularly in the early part of the day. Harry insisted upon Elsie's going without him, much against her wishes, for said she to him quietly, when an opportunity afforded: "Why, Harry, I will be so lonesome without you, just to think it is more than a month that we have been together every day, and the thought of going to the lake without you, and instead with your friend for my escort, makes me feel so lonely. Won't you please go?"

They stood under an arch of bending willows, where the sun shone through the tender limbs. The little leaves glistened and sparkled with the brightness of diamonds. The morning sun threw soft rays upon the sweet, upturned face of Elsie, while she pleaded with her lover to go. He stooped and kissed her, and told her softly, much as he would like to go he dared not, for already he felt a slight pain in his side again, the old trouble returning. He thought it proper not to venture too far away for a few days yet, but he was anxious that Roy should see as much of the country as possible, in the short time he intended to stay, and that she must not break up the party, but go for his sake. After much entreating on his part she finally consented to go.

About 9 o'clock they were ready to start. A two-

seated carriage drawn by a spanking team of bays whirled around by the porch, Olive, Guy, Elsie and Roy taking seats in the order named, driving off amid the shouts and huzzahs of the family, who had gathered there to bid them a pleasant and joyous time. There was a gleam of great satisfaction in the eye of Roy as they drove away, and a look of disappointment and apparent unhappiness in the face of Elsie, as she looked back and threw a kiss to Harry. The lovers, Guy and Olive, were happy, though Guy of late had been somewhat annoyed at Olive, for she did not seem to him as affectionate as usual, and often he found her gazing into vacancy, with no particular object in view, and unconscious of the fact until her attention was called to it by him, then she would excuse herself in a half-hearted way, which brought no little discomfort to him.

While Elsie was unhappy within, she tried to dispel her disappointment from her mind, and be gay and light-hearted as possible away from Harry.

After the party reached the lake and had their team cared for, they made haste to the shore, procured boats and went for a sail, Roy and Elsie going in one direction, Guy and Olive in another. The waters of the lake were smooth and undisturbed, sheltered as it was by woodland on three sides, it was well protected from the high winds of the early fall. The sun shone out brightly, but the heavy woods along the shore cast a shadow far out on the lake, which added greatly to the pleasantness of the sail.

"Miss Elsie, do you know, much as I would like to

have had Harry with us to-day, I am happy in the fact that just you and I are here on this beautiful lake, all by ourselves?" said Roy.

"Are you?" replied Elsie. "Indeed, for my part, I am extremely sorry he is not with us, he has never been up here to my knowledge, and I know he would have enjoyed the trip, if he had thought it prudent to come."

"Oh! I don't doubt you are sorry that Harry is not here, but I am here," he said, looking straight into her perfect eyes, with a half-smile on his face, and then waited for her reply.

"Yes, I am aware you are here, Mr. Wallis, but that fact does not change my wishing for him, does it?"

"No, I presume not; perhaps we had better go back, as you seem to be somewhat lost without him. I am afraid you won't enjoy the day unless we do."

"Oh! no, Mr. Wallis, do not say that; I certainly will enjoy the sail, I love the water. Olive and I often come here with papa and mamma. They all enjoy sailing or rowing. Not alone is the lake attractive, but the scenery around it gives it much life, and altogether makes such a beautiful picture."

"Yes, that is true, but you know, Miss Oaks, my mind is of a sentimental turn, and when I come in contact with one to whom I am attracted, all other subjects become secondary and that one paramount to them all."

"Ha! ha!" laughed Elsie; "so you are one of those sentimental young men; Harry never said anything to me about it."

"Well, Harry doesn't know me, no one does, nor ever

will, I am not an open book that I can be read by every one who takes the fancy; I hate surface people."

"What do you mean by surface people, Mr. Wallis?"

"I mean those who have no depth to their mind, who just live without any purpose in view, live for the day only, I don't. I have an object in life, something beyond the present."

"Oh, yes, I understand you, I guess surface people are shallow, light, no character, but to have a purpose in view, 'tis well, if that object be pure and good. Some men have in view good deeds which they hope to accomplish, though it may take them years; I trust whatever you may hope to obtain may bring you much happiness in the doing of it and in its possession."

"Thank you for your good wish, your mind seems to dwell a little in a religious channel, Miss Elsie. I refer not to things of church, more of state."

"What do you mean by things of church and state?"

"Why, by the word church I mean just this; you say you hope that my aim in life is for the pure and good, and all that; the pure and good which you speak of belongs to the church, they are characteristic of the Christian. I am not a professor of religion. By state I mean political pre-eminence, social life, a leadership in society, without regard to religious creed."

"Ah, yes, I comprehend you—you are looking for honors; you are aware, I suppose, that often men are sorely disappointed in that respect; their hopes and ambitions are elevated to a wonderful degree, only to be cast down when the result is known, after the long

struggle with which they have been engaged in for glory or honor."

"Be it so, Miss Elsie, I am one of those who, when there is something to gain, will put every effort forth, use all my strength to accomplish that purpose; if defeat should be my reward, I will redouble my efforts and strength, until finally I will possess that which I covet."

They had been out now for quite some time, and as they glanced across to the other side, they could see Guy and Olive in their boat making for the shore where the hotel was situated to get their lunch, so they turned their boat and rowed in the same direction and soon they all met upon the wide piazza and enjoyed a hearty meal, as well as the cool breezes which were blowing from the lake, which seemed to increase their appetite and add to the enjoyment of their rest from the long row.

The afternoon was spent in walking about the woods, in conversation, and in gathering flowers natural to that woody country. Elsie was very agreeable to her escort, but gave him no particular encouragement, for all her answers to him and his many hints were only favorable to Harry, although she did not suspect he was in love with her, for she had heard other men talk before as he had done, and placed no serious purpose in any of his remarks; yet not to mislead him, she constantly spoke of Harry, to assure him though he was absent he was not forgotten by any means.

Seated upon a rustic seat later in the afternoon with

Elsie by his side, he unfolded more of his real nature and feelings to her than he intended to do.

"Though I have known you, Miss Elsie, but a short time, yet I feel as though I had a life acquaintance with you. The words of praise which Harry wrote to me of you since he became a resident of Twin Oaks, have dwelt upon my mind, and when I come to see you face to face, I can but realize his feelings."

"Hush, Mr. Wallis, you have no right to speak to me thus; I cannot permit it—you have no right because you know I am engaged to Harry, and furthermore, you are doing him an injustice, and I will not consent to be a party to it. If you continue to say anything further in that strain I start for home if I go alone."

"Oh! you need not threaten me, it is not necessary, for I don't believe you will make a scene here; it would not be wise; you must hear what I have to say."

Elsie turned her head away and gazed down through the woods into the far away with a dreamy look in her eyes. Her face was flushed from the excitement caused by the few words she was compelled to speak to Roy. Her heart beat rapidly against her breast, her blood coursed through her veins quickly. She was determining in her mind whether to carry out her threat or sit still and listen to his words, when suddenly up through the thicket she saw the form of a man as he came out in the clearing more to view. She recognized the son of the village postmaster. She arose from her seat, extended her hand and said, "Why, Mr. Bixby, you are not lost, I hope?"

"No, indeed, I am not, Elsie; I'm just on my way to the lake for a sail."

"Allow me, Mr. Bixby, to introduce you to Mr. Wallis, a friend of Mr. Pendleton."

"Ah, yes, I am glad to know you, Mr. Wallis."

"Won't you sit down, Charley," said Elsie. "There is plenty of room here for you."

"Well, I don't like to interfere; three is a crowd, you know," he said, on taking his seat.

"Oh! you are not interfering one bit," remarked Elsie, as she looked toward Roy with a smile on her face, happy at the chance to break up the conversation which he was bent on pursuing.

While Roy did not dare to show his displeasure at the third party, he wished him far away just then; but using his customary tact, he joined in a general conversation with them, and soon Olive and Guy sauntered up to where they were sitting and informed them the time for going home had arrived.

On reaching Twin Oaks they found the family awaiting their return to give them a hearty welcome from their day's outing.

Roy spent a week at Twin Oaks and was royally entertained by all. Elsie kept the secret of their conversation to herself, for she did not dare tell it—she knew it would make bitter feelings, and possibly end in much unpleasantness for all concerned.

They made daily trips to nearby places of note. Fortunately for Elsie, Harry was able to accompany them, and Roy found no opportunity to renew his conversa-

tion that was so unexpectedly interrupted at the lake. When he departed for his home in the city he did so with regret, because he would be away from Elsie, away from her beautiful home, not because he would be separated from Harry, he gave that no thought whatever. Promising them all that he would come again soon, thanking them for their hospitality, he was compelled to say good-by. As he shook Harry by the hand his cordiality outwardly displayed was in no comparison to the feeling of jealousy and hatred within him. As the train moved away from the station, Roy stood on the platform and waved a farewell to those who came to say good-by. He watched them from his position there until he was carried beyond their sight. With a heavy heart he took his seat in the car and soon was apparently lost in dreams of the future.

CHAPTER V.

YIELDING TO TEMPTATION.

In a former chapter we left Olive in her room in the early morning in bitter tears. Her conscience brought to her mind the positiveness of the wrong she was doing to herself and her lover, in fulfilling her promise to meet Van in the village a little later in the day. She temporarily mastered the contemptible spirit of deceit which so filled her heart and declared she would not go, she could not deceive Guy in that way. Then again the tempter said to her: "What harm can come from it? You will soon be married and then you can settle down in life. Go, if you would be happy." Then she said: "Yes, I will go; no one will be the wiser of my meeting him." Yet she found it impossible to arise from her seat; her heart beat with unusual rapidity; her form trembled with excitement, which she brought upon herself by her disposition to yield to the evil spirit. With wonderful persistence she jumped to her feet, dashed away the tears from her eyes and bathed them in cool water, to take away the redness from weeping.

"I am silly to lose control of my feelings in this way; I shall go and meet you Mr. Chadwick, I admire you; *your eyes gaze at* me so fondly; your voice sounds like

music to me; your presence fills me with a strange happiness; yes, I must go."

She finished her toilet and descended to the room below, where the family were gathered ready for breakfast. No one discovered that anything had taken place by the expression of her countenance from that of other mornings, the indomitable will which she possessed drove from her mind and from her face all traces of the struggle of the half hour before, and she appeared gay, light-hearted, and full of spirit, entering into conversation in her usual manner. The meal over, she hastened to her room and made ready for her walk to the village. She had no difficulty in getting away, as it was her custom to go often on some trifling little errand. Elsie's time was well occupied in looking after Harry. So she gave no concern as to her movements about the house.

Olive walked with a quick step, as the hour of her appointment was at hand. On her way she met a number she knew, but did not allow them to deter her from keeping her engagement. As she passed down through the main street of the village she slackened her pace, for just beyond was the beautiful little stone church where Van had promised to be waiting. It stood a little back from the highway, bordered around by a hedge of cedar trees, a green lawn in front, with a neat, graveled path leading to the main entrance of the building. The old church was English in its style of architecture, and was covered over with ivy; so closely had the creeping vines fastened themselves to the

structure, that scarcely any of the stone work was visible at a short distance. It made a pretty picture in the early morning sunlight, a most perfect spot for the rendezvous. On nearing the church she slowed her footsteps. When fairly in front of it she gazed around half-timidly to see if he was there; when out from behind one of the cedar trees he stepped quickly, Olive gave a little exclamation:

"Oh! Mr. Chadwick."

"Why, good-morning, Miss Oaks, I am delighted to see you have kept your promise, I was half-afraid you wouldn't."

"You evidently don't know me, Mr. Chadwick;" looking up into his face with one of her sweetest smiles.

"I hope I may, Miss Oaks, you need much praise for being so prompt, on the minute almost, for I have been waiting a very short time for you, yet the few moments I have been here seemed almost as many hours."

"Ah! you imagine that, Mr. Chadwick. You know some people have very vivid imaginations indeed, and I am afraid you possess such."

"No, not so, because since we parted yesterday I have indulged in a thousand dreams of this walk; it was impossible, even if I had tried, to let any other subject into my mind but the happy thought that I had met you, even if you were the promised wife of another."

"Hush, not so loud," said Olive, "some one might her what you say." As she turned her pretty face upward and looked into his eyes, his heart beat wildly,

his inward feelings gave to his countenance a bright glow, his eyes sparkled with delight as he met the quick glances of Olive and the two understood each other without words. They were in love—both conscious of the fact that they had no right to tread upon that pathway. When a human heart meets its first love there is that mysterious something which gives to the feelings of the heart and mind as well, a consciousness of the fact without any difficulty and that consciousness should remain forever, or else there is no true and abiding love in the heart—it is merely a sentiment—a passing fancy. Thousands of young and tender hearts are pledged together in this world before there is that assurance of a deep affection for each other. A decision should not be formed upon quick, shy glances, a low, sweet voice, beautiful-fitting garments, or an exquisite form, but it should be based on the general character of the person, the conversation and expression of thought, the daily life exemplified.

After a walk of a half-hour or more, they reached the high hills back of the town, where lovers were wont to go. The spot was a sightly one, overlooking a wide expanse of country, down through the far-off valley, over the plain, to the distant mountain side. More could be viewed from that point than anywhere in that vicinity. The property belonged to Mr. Sargent (who, the reader will remember, was an uncle of Mr. Chadwick). Upon the very top of the hill he had erected a summerhouse, or at least an apology for one, for it was a crude affair, yet a delightful place to rest

after the climb. While it was built for the comfort of those who visited there, it was also put to other and more profitable use, as a shelter from the heat and rays of the burning sun, during the fruit season. The toilers would go into the little house and rest, enjoying the breezes which at all seasons of the year blew across the hilltop with considerable force. The air, perfumed with the scent of pines and hemlocks, made it a most delightful place to be in.

For more than two hours they chatted away upon topics both far from and near to the one which was uppermost in their minds, enjoying the scenery along with their conversation.

"I should love to live in this section of the country, Miss Oaks, and think perhaps, I shall soon; for already I hear of a property for sale which would just suit me, and my uncle says it can be purchased reasonably."

"That would be nice. It is farm land I presume?" said Olive.

"Oh, no, it is one of the village stores; you know I am in mercantile life in the city; uncle wants me to locate here, and now since I have met you I have a good reason for doing so, beyond the fact that it is a good financial prospect for me to engage in business in Winchester."

"Yes, true, but how can the fact of my living here interest you, as I am to be married so shortly."

"I know it, but do not marry yet; you must not, Miss Oaks." As he said these words he boldly took

both her hands in his and gazed into her eyes. She gave a sigh, oh, so deep, and turned her head away so as not to meet his look; she drew her hands away, hastily arose to her feet as if by a sudden impulse, and said:

"Oh! it cannot be otherwise, Mr. Chadwick. What would Guy say—what would my parents say? Have mercy—this is awful; let me go home at once."

"You know you do not love Mr. Hills as you should. Why do you enter into such a state of unhappiness willingly?"

"There are things to be considered. Look at the years of our courtship—from childhood—we have grown up in each other's company. While I admit Guy has not my whole love, I don't really know that I could give that to any man."

"Oh, Olive, don't say that; you can, you must listen to me, my heart——"

"Hush! I am speaking; let me continue. I have always given him the preference and it is too late now to recall the decision of the past. I have given my promise and must abide by it."

"It is never too late to undo a wrong, my dear, never too late to retrace your steps. You must not marry Guy Hills. I predict for you unhappiness, sorrow, and disappointment. Wait awhile. Tell him—tell him all, and he will release you."

"Such talk is folly. You would not speak thus if you knew him. He is a determined man. Do you suppose after waiting all these years he would be put

off with any excuse which I might offer to him? He would not believe me. I mean he is determined in his love for me. While he might be influenced to do most anything else, because of his easy disposition and nature, in this no one could persuade him differently."

"Yes, but you could make him believe you by showing him you love another."

Olive looked her friend and persistent admirer full in the face, and replied:

"Mr. Chadwick, I am a woman and possess a woman's heart. While I am doing wrong in meeting you this morning, I certainly shall draw the line and go no further. I will not openly destroy the peace of mind which I know Guy has, for he believes in me and to break our engagement now would perhaps bring much unhappiness to us both—unless he should give me a just cause; please do not tempt me to do wrong, do not put such thoughts into my mind."

"I am not tempting you to do wrong, Olive, but I am simply speaking for your own happiness and future; it would be better he know it now than in after years."

"He shall never know from me other than that I love him. If I have made a mistake I will bear it all myself."

"You cannot keep it from those whom you come in contact with; you cannot hide it from me. I can already read some of the thoughts of your heart, Olive. They speak to me through the expression of your eyes, through your words and actions, and if there is wrong, *it is* in keeping the secret of your love for another

within your own bosom, shut up from all the world; how much happier you would be and I."

"Don't, don't speak thus, Mr. Chadwick, 'tis cruel; my promise, my promise! I cannot break it, it is too late!" She buried her face in her hands and wept aloud. She was so overcome by the force of Van's words that she lost control of her feelings, and gave way to them in tears, for some time, and sobbed like a child.

Olive, with all her disposition to be frivolous and deceitful, seemed to possess a tender heart spasmodically.

After much persuasion on Van's part, he succeeded in subduing the paroxysm of excitement which so overcame her. She dried her tears and raised her head, to behold him with a smile upon his face, and his large, handsome eyes gazing into hers, as he sat upon the old rustic seat in the summerhouse, close by her side. He then talked to her of his first meeting with her; of his eccentric uncle; of how when she drove out of Mr. Sargent's yard with Guy, she looked back and spoke to him of the trip she would make the next morning to the village; of how they met and planned for this meeting, and after an acquaintance of less than three days, they were as old friends. She forgot all about her tears or her apparent unhappiness; it was all lost in the words of her companion.

As they sauntered back to the village, their conversation was upon the self-same subject. That seemingly was paramount to all others. Van could not exact any

promise from her to break off with Guy, yet she admitted almost in words, certainly in the fond expression of the eyes, as she looked toward him, that she did not love him as she ought.

Dear reader, you may think it strange that a girl claiming to possess the conscience which Olive did, expressing so much sympathy for Guy's unhappiness, could act in such a manner; but the fact is, she was deceitful in her nature, possessing many unpleasant traits which were hid by her fascinating powers, to a great extent. While she thought she loved Guy, her fickle nature did not permit her to love with any depth of feeling. Her pride would not allow her to do anything else but carry out the contract of marriage, as the news of her approaching wedding had been spread far and near. In country places the whole community is posted on the business affairs of their neighbors; hence Guy's and Olive's courtship had become somewhat a matter of history.

If Olive could have broken off the engagement with ease, she would have done so; but she knew it was not an easy matter to cast him aside as a toy which had become monotonous. Though she possessed some love for him, her heart was not entirely his; she reserved a portion of it to satisfy her unstable nature. Her disposition would not permit her to yield her affections to one—only in part. Thus the days did come and go; she saw much of Guy as the time approached for their wedding though she found time and opportunity to clandestinely meet Van in and about the village,

until their meetings were noticed by many. When the fact reached the ears of Guy, he hastened to know from her own lips the truth of the story. Olive found no difficulty in setting his mind at rest on the subject.

"You know, Guy, I would not do anything to offend you; Mr. Chadwick is thought so much of by the Sargents, and you know they are our dearest friends, and besides he knows we are to be married soon; the few little chats I have had with him could possibly do no harm. I assure you, Mr. Chadwick cares nothing for me in the least. His coming to Winchester is for health and rest; there is nothing here to attract him beyond his relatives, and the benefit he derives from the climate. So give yourself no uneasiness, my dear. The idlers about the village have always tried to make trouble between us and they now think they have some food to satisfy their craving desire. I beseech of you to trust me and not listen to their chatter."

When she had finished Guy's face was all smiles, happy in the belief that Olive was true to him in every way, and worthy of the deep love which he possessed in his heart of hearts for her.

Unconscious of her deceit and wily ways, he believed her. She had such a nice faculty of overcoming his doubts, which very few could have done; she was so artful and possessed so much strategy while he was innocent of any schemes or unlawful thoughts. The preparations for the wedding continued.

CHAPTER VI.

THE WEDDING.

THE long-expected marriage of Olive to Guy brought with it no unusual amount of excitement; for approaching nuptials are always the occasion of considerable confusion within the household and there was no exception to the rule in this case.

The affair would certainly have taken place some time before had it not been for the dreadful accident which occurred on the 4th of July, and threw their home into such a state of commotion, bringing with it abundance of trouble, foreshadowing that to come.

October is a beautiful month for a wedding. If there is any choice in the time of year it lies between June and October. The latter has one advantage over the former; the foliage has fully matured and brought to nature her extremely delicate colors; while in June the buds and leaves are just putting forth their appearance.

Great preparations were made for the wedding; no sooner had the Pendletons left Twin Oaks than the dressmakers came, the great house was all bustle and excitement throughout from morning till night; every moment of time was used in planning and arranging matters in order to make the wedding a memorable one.

The family were so prominent and well known that much was expected from them on such an occasion, and it was their wish not to disappoint the guests and to make the feast one of great enjoyment.

Olive flew about the house, seeming to be gay and cheerful, as if the forthcoming event was the crowning joy of her life—forgetting the days and days of flirtation with other men, apparently, as if this was her only thought and had been. She seemed to greatly enjoy the notoriety and importance of her present relationship to the ceremony, it was all Olive, Olive, everywhere; she was the first to be consulted upon every subject relative to the wedding.

Elsie was on hand to render any assistance. It was her wont to be faithful in every phase of life; so now she went about with much energy, to make every hour that passed show that something had been accomplished toward the work necessary for such an event. But Olive was the prime factor of all, the other members were secondary.

Guy was at Twin Oaks the most of the time for a few days previous to the wedding. His deep interest in Olive did not wane, but grew as time sped on, and as the day approached he really became somewhat nervous and anxious for the hour when he could claim for his own that love which for years he had held so sacred, and believed to be fashioned in heaven for him. He held marriage as a very sacred unity, something for time and eternity, which should not be entered into unless the contracting parties were assured of their love

for each other, for this continuity which emanates from God was to him holy and ought not to be dealt with lightly, but rather there should be a spirit of oneness in the vow—"That which God hath joined together let not man put asunder."

"Elsie," said Olive, "I presume you want Harry's friend Mr. Wallis invited," as they sat one evening in the parlor discussing the list of names.

"Well, Olive, I suppose so—he no doubt will look for an invitation, but for my part I don't care whether he has one or not."

"Why, Elsie, what do you mean?"

"I mean just this, Olive; I don't like him, he is too presumptuous; he is deceitful and not that sort of man Harry would have for a friend if he knew him, as I know him."

"Pray, Elsie, what do you know about Mr. Wallis that Harry does not, when he has known him so long?"

"Yes, known him so long to be sure; but only in a business way and very slightly socially."

"How did you, or rather he, come to invite him here, then?"

"Oh, because he thinks well of him, Olive; I haven't told Harry of my dislike of him."

"Why don't you?"

"I hate to make any trouble, yet if he persists in annoying me, as he did when here before, I shall—let the consequences be what they may."

"Won't you confide in me, Elsie, and tell me what he said to you?"

"I would rather not, Olive, in words, yet I will say this he tried to set me against Harry in every way, and made me awfully angry; but to save bitter words between them, I kept the secret to myself.

"Brave girl, Elsie, you did quite right in the matter. I believe I noticed he paid you a wonderful sight of attention, yet I thought it was characteristic of his nature to be gallant. We had better leave his name off the list."

"Oh, no, no, Olive, I would not; for you see Harry might think it strange. Better invite him and I will keep out of his way as much as possible. There will be so many here that I will have sufficient excuse to give him very little attention. So send him an invitation by all means."

More than two hundred people were invited to the wedding, all the prominent citizens of Winchester and many outside the village; among the number Olive invited Mr. Chadwick. The Sargents were coming and of course it would be in direct line to ask Van. The Hills, Oaks, and Sargents were among the very oldest residents of that vicinity and "Mr. Sargent might not like it," said Olive, "if we did not ask his nephew, inasmuch as we are quite friends, you know." Of course the Oaks family did not know just how friendly Olive had been with him, or how deeply she was interested in the fact of having Van there.

October 12th, the day of the wedding at last dawned. A fairer day was never known; the country was rich in its turning foliage, the air so pure and fresh, was sweet

with perfume from the pines off the far-away hills to the south and west. The buildings in and around Twin Oaks had been newly painted. The lawns, cut closely, were handsome in their soft velvet of green, and gave to the home an appearance of magnificence and beauty.

The wedding hour was set for eight in the evening, but long before that time the guests began to arrive in numbers. Among the very first to reach the house were the Pendletons and along with them Roy Wallis, resplendent in new attire. Elsie was radiant with happiness at the sight of her lover, but the expression was gone when she extended her hand to Roy. She was polite to him, though cool; his very presence filled her with awe; a feeling of dread went over her when she gazed upon his face. She had not forgotten his former visit, neither had he, for said he:

"I am happy to see you again, Miss Oaks. The impression which my first visit to this home made upon me, has never left me for one instant. I have pictured Twin Oaks and its occupants before my eyes many times since."

"I am glad you enjoyed your visit here," said Elsie in reply.

Harry walked away with Elsie, while Roy stood talking to Mrs. Oaks. His eyes, though, followed them closely. Elsie's loving looks to Harry seemed to arouse his hatred and feelings of jealousy at once. A dark flash of anger went over his face as he nursed the bitter thoughts that were in his mind.

Among the next arrivals were the Sargents and Van Chadwick. Unfortunately, he, too, must come to a place where his heart was deeply interested, in apparently a lost cause, knowing that the union which was soon to follow would destroy his last hope. Yet he had been more successful in his love-making than Roy, though it brought him but little satisfaction. Still he had kindled a love within the heart of Olive that would not die easily. The words he had so often softly whispered in her ear still lingered in her mind, and served to make her look upon him there, at that time, as a welcome guest.

A great host of country folks arrived one after another, until the house was nearly filled. The halls were filled with rare plants in abundance everywhere. The decorations were under the care of experienced hands. No pains were spared to make the house as beautiful within as without. The room where the ceremony was performed was large and commodious, sufficient in size to hold nearly all the guests; by crowding in the doorways and halls all could see and hear. The great, tall clock in the front hall struck eight. All the people were assembled. Mr. and Mrs. Oaks, the Pendletons, Elsie, the groom's father and mother. The Sargents with Van Chadwick and Roy Wallis stood near together, while the neighbors and townspeople crowded up near them and with breathless silence waited; but not long, for soon the signal was given and down the stairway came the bride to be, and close by her side the bridegroom.

Olive's face was pale and stern. It apparently wore no expression of supreme happiness that usually accompanies the bridal march, though the sweet strains of music which the orchestra sounded out from behind a screen of ferns and palms in one corner of the room, filled the soul with delight and thrilled the being of each and every lover of its sweetness. Olive seemed unconscious of the fact; she walked with measured tread and dignity. As she stepped into the parlor, where the guests were assembled, the first flush of embarrassment was noticeable in her face, her cheeks reddened slightly then the color deepened which gave to her expression life and beauty and a look befitting the occasion, whether it was caused by the thought that she was about to face her many friends whose countenances wore happy smiles and looks of interest, or whether she caught the eye of Chadwick who stood directly opposite the door as she entered—at any rate, the moment she came into his presence a change came over her. Guy, proud of the hour, was happy, his face all aglow, he had no alliance, no intrigue with any other —it was all Olive—only Olive—and walking beside her toward the altar of marriage, surrounded by his friends, neighbors, and relatives, soon to make a charming young lady his wife, his heart beat with gladness; it was the happiest moment of his life; the crowning result of years of waiting; the fulfillment of a long-cherished hope.

Apparently Olive was somewhat nervous; she cast her eyes downward, while she could feel the very blood

of her veins rush with mighty force through her cheeks, and every fiber of her being was fast becoming conscious of the fact that her mind was undergoing a great strain. All eyes were turned toward her; she seemed to be the only attraction of the moment. Behind her sister Elsie stood Chadwick, with his eyes riveted upon her. Although no doubt she would gladly have met his in an expression of assurance that she still sympathized with him, yet she could not bring herself to a position to recognize him even in so brief a way.

In the silence of that moment, young Wallis was gazing just as fondly at Elsie, hoping he might be rewarded with at least a sweet smile from her; but ah, no. He was doomed to disappointment, for Elsie had smiles for only one and he stood close by her side; she had eyes for no one but Harry.

The dignified pastor stepped forward at the proper moment, and in a solemn voice commenced the ceremony which soon made the couple man and wife. Under the circumstances, it cannot be said "made the *happy* couple man and wife," because there was not the fullest appreciation, the most satisfactory alliance on the part of Olive, for in that very room within a few feet of her stood the one she would rather have had beside her as husband. Oh! what a hollow mockery to boldly stand up and promise those solemn vows, knowing that each word she uttered was a lie, while her unsuspecting companion listened to the promises which she made, which filled his heart with joy! The human heart is so deceitful, but right and righteous-

ness are bound to prevail sooner or later, even though the innocent must suffer too.

Notwithstanding all this the bride's outward appearance was one of surpassing loveliness. Her dress was of a very soft, fluffy material, pure white, which added much to her dark beauty, and showed plainly every graceful curve in her figure. The rich glow on her face now (which perhaps Van's looks of admiration had brought there), was the finishing touch. To one unacquainted with all the facts of the case, the judgment would be that no happier, sweeter bride ever stood before a clergyman for marriage.

Congratulations followed, which brought life and joy to the happy assemblage. The many good wishes and hopes for their prosperity, their unity, and uninterrupted love, the sweet strains of music from the orchestra—made the scene truly one of great animation and to be long remembered.

After congratulations were over there was a general scattering of the guests through the halls and parlors. Olive excused herself from her husband for a moment to speak to some one she saw in the hall; on going from the room she met Van face to face. Although just a few moments before he came up and greeted her as Mrs. Hills and wished her a happy life, now again he extended his hand which she seemed perfectly willing to take in hers. Whispering in her ear he said: "I am coming to Winchester to live permanently in a short time."

"Why, Van, you are not," said Olive. Her heart beat

so fast and strange at his remarks, for an instant she could hardly realize his words. She thought too: "He will live near me then." He released her hand, their eyes met again; a smile so sweet to him passed over her face he knew it would be agreeable to her. As they parted he said:

"Farewell for a season." Olive watched him as he went down the hall, until soon others came to where she was standing and commenced conversation, which temporarily relieved her mind from the subject. Guy then coming along, slipped his arm through that of his wife's and the journey to the dining room followed.

The tables were beautifully arranged and loaded with many good things to eat. It was a happy crowd that sat down to enjoy the wedding feast; aunts, uncles, cousins, neighbors, and friends, and lovers as well, all enjoying themselves on this wonderful occasion.

There were three people who were not in the fullest enjoyment of the hour, notwithstanding Olive was presumably so; but the other two were in a much less happy state. Roy watched Elsie every moment when she was in sight, though she gave him no particular recognition beyond the first meeting in the afternoon, for her time was occupied in moving among the guests and entertaining Harry. Wherever she went he was by her side, much to her delight and to the displeasure of Roy; he really was jealous at the attention Elsie paid to him, while he had no right to be, as he had no claim upon her heart whatever. Van seemed more fortunate in every way than Roy for, singular as it may

seem, he sat opposite Olive at the table. The Sargents being so intimate with the family and he their guest and nephew, of course he was seated with them at the bride's table and fortunately within convenient speaking distance of her; perhaps Olive had arranged it to suit herself. Although he could not find an opportunity to speak privately to her then, nevertheless he gazed fondly into her eyes and with his eyes spoke volumes which she understood. Roy was seated at another table among a lot of strangers, people he had never met before; whether purposely placed there no one knew, perhaps, but Elsie—she might have been able to tell if the question had been asked. No one apparently noticed it but himself, and he was provoked at the fact, but, of course, could not do other than accept the situation gracefully. He was soon engaged in conversation with those to whom he had been introduced and seemingly enjoyed himself as much as the rest.

The meal over, it was a bustle of excitement in the parlor, for the bride and groom were soon to catch a late train for the city. Every one wanted to have a last word to say before they took their departure. Among those who found an opportunity to do so was Van. He had but a moment, yet made use of it. What he said there at that moment to Olive she never forgot; it followed her thoughts on her wedding journey; it was predominant over all other thoughts; yet she was married now and it could not be undone; it was too late! too late!

Elsie tried to avoid meeting Roy alone, but he had

watched her movements so closely that the moment he found her away from Harry he made his way to where she was standing in conversation with some friends. Approaching her from an opposite direction she did not discover his coming until he spoke to her. Elsie had to be polite to him for Harry's sake, for never had she repeated a word of his former conversation to Harry. Olive was the only one she had mentioned it to and then only in part, so that Harry did not realize the unfaithfulness of his pretended friend, in fact, was ignorant of his proceedings.

Elsie was half-afraid that Harry would speak of Roy's being seated at another table, at the supper, other than the one where the Pendletons were placed; but if he had, she was prepared to answer, without any prevarication whatever; the intimate friends and relatives were so numerous that they would feel hurt if put elsewhere; so she was compelled to crowd him out.

Roy's manner was extremely sweet and placid, taking no advantage seemingly of the absence of Harry, beyond pleasant conversation, which was very surprising to Elsie; because the great object she had in avoiding him was not to give him opportunity to use the language which made her so unhappy on the day they visited Black Lake, some weeks previous. She was mortally afraid his first speech would be a repetition of the past, but when he made no allusion to the former feelings of his heart she was put at ease and seemed more like herself, which really made him more anxious to win her.

He chatted away for some time with the ladies in the group, until one by one they departed and left him alone with Elsie. At first he seemed somewhat embarrassed at the situation, while Elsie was not ill at ease at all, on account of his previous good behavior, for the little time he had just spent in conversation made her feel free to listen to him, as he made no personal remark as he had done before, but talked more upon the event of the evening and topics in general. Suddenly, as if a new thought had entered his mind, he said:

"Miss Oaks, I have had no good opportunity to speak to you upon a subject which I am anxious about—as I intend going away in the morning, I would like you to give me a few moments by ourselves—later—in fact, I must see you."

Elsie's whole manner at once changed, her face assumed a stern look, her dignity was touched by the nerve that Roy displayed in his presumption.

"If you wish to speak to me, Mr. Wallis, do so now; I cannot grant you such a request; you ought to have known better than to ask it."

"I do not see why you cannot do me this favor."

"I have my own reasons and they are good and sufficient."

"I suppose on account of Mr. Pendleton?"

"You must excuse me, Mr. Wallis, I have to go." With these words sounding in his ears Elsie walked rapidly out of the room to find Harry, half-resolved to relate to him her experience with his friend. By the

time she found him she had somewhat recovered from her excitement and she postponed it until some more convenient season.

Roy was angry at the abruptness with which Elsie left him and vowed revenge upon her for her seeming indifference to him. While he stood in the corner alone, busy with his thoughts, he saw a face across the room which seemed familiar to him; he had met the young man somewhere. Suddenly it came to him where. Instantly a thought flashed through his mind that he would go over and be friendly with him and cultivate his acquaintance, for it might be valuable to him. No sooner had the thought entered his mind than he proceeded to execute it; with his hand extended toward the young man, who gazed at him in profound wonderment, Roy said, "You do not seem to remember me, sir?"

"No, I never saw you before," replied the stranger.

"Ah, yes, my dear sir, I met you a few weeks since at Black Lake—don't you remember me now?"

"Oh, yes, I do; Mr. Wallis, I believe, Mr. Wallis of Boston; you were up there with Miss Oaks?"

"Yes, Miss Oaks," replied Wallis. "I am glad to meet you again, Mr. Bixby. I saw you standing here alone, and thought I would come over and be friendly."

"Thank you, sir, I like to be sociable myself."

"Yes; by the way, you live in Winchester, I believe?"

"Yes, lived here always."

"I presume, you were born in Winchester."

"Exactly so, I am in the post office—with my father."

"In the post office—a clerk for your father?"

"Yes, sir."

"I don't imagine you get much pay."

"No, sir."

"No—how long have you and your father been in the office there?"

"Father has been there longer than I have."

"Perhaps he has been there a good many years?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, Mr. Bixby, I thought maybe as your wages were light in Winchester—that is, small—you would like to come to Boston, where the chances are much better for a young man. I might use my influence and get you a good position."

"Oh, I wish you would, sir, I am getting so tired of country life. Then, as you say, they can't pay much wages up here. Father doesn't give me but four dollars a week and my board, though he promised me five right after he took me in the office four years ago, and I am getting tired of waiting."

"Well, I should say so; you ought to be making more money now than four dollars a week; I will have to see what I can do for you when I get back to the city."

While they were in conversation, Mr. Chadwick drew near in company with his uncle whom he introduced. "Allow me, Mr. Wallis, to present you to my uncle, Mr. Sargent, of Winchester."

"I am happy to know you, Mr. Sargent," Roy said, bowing very politely, "you are an old resident here, I suppose?"

"Yes, indeed; I have lived within a stone's throw of Twin Oaks for forty years. The Providence of God has been good to me."

"Yes, and time has whitened your hair too, Mr. Sargent."

"True, true, Mr. Wallis, 'The glory of young men is their strength and the beauty of old men is the gray head.' "

"Ha! ha! Mr. Sargent, in what part of the Bible do you find that quotation?" said Roy sarcastically.

"Why, young man, you will find that in Prov. xx., verse xxix."

The remarks of Wallis were a little tinged with sarcasm and it touched the finer feelings of Mr. Sargent; he had but little respect for one who made light of the Bible in any form, so in addition to the verse quoted, he said: "If you will take the pains to read Prov. xiii., verse xiii., it will do you a power of good."

"Oh! I haven't time, Mr. Sargent; you had better quote it for me now."

"Well, I will, my son: 'Whoso despiseth the word shall be destroyed, but he that feareth the commandment shall be rewarded.' I bid you good-night, sir."

Mr. Sargent passed on and left his nephew and Roy alone.

"Your uncle is rather eccentric, I should judge," said Roy.

"Yes, rather, but he is very religious and an exceedingly good man."

"That may be; but how odd of him to talk religion to me, or practically the same thing, and I a stranger to him."

"Well, that is uncle's way; he invariably quotes Scripture to everybody, so you are no exception, Mr. Wallis. By George! here comes the bridal party. Why, Olive is going; we will have to see her and Guy away."

The whole house was wild with excitement bidding adieu first to one and then to another. Olive was in high spirits. Guy was running to and fro giving messages to different ones. Elsie, Harry, the Pendletons, Mr. and Mrs. Oaks, were all loaded down with rice and the customary old shoes, to give them a farewell salute. A great crowd pressed out upon the piazza and around the carriage; with much music and laughter they made merry the parting. They covered them with another shower of rice and kept up the serenade down the driveway to the gate which led out to the highway, and with a rush and a whirl the carriage and its occupants were soon lost to sight.

The crowd wended their way slowly back to the house and soon, owing to the lateness of the hour, a general leave-taking of one and another was in order. The lights in the beautiful home were out, Twin Oaks was silent, Olive and Guy were married—were one.

CHAPTER VII.

A BAD OMEN.

It was early in January, less than three months after Olive's wedding, that one day as Elsie was in her room busy at some trifling household duties, suddenly, as if by some great force a large mirror which hung from the wall by a hook fell with a loud crash and broke into a thousand pieces. She ran from the room screaming with fright. Her cry was heard all through the great house. One after another came running to learn the cause of the disturbance. When the fact was known and it was found that no real harm had been done beyond "the broken mirror," the fright of the other members of the household was soon over.

But Elsie, being somewhat superstitious, it was no easy matter for her to pass the accident out of her mind; a presentiment of evil, a foreboding of some serious happening at once took possession of her mind. Do her best, she could not get away from that thought; while she knew that superstition only dwelt in the minds of the ignorant, of those who were born in poverty and not privileged to enjoy educational advantages as she had, yet the circumstances in this case warranted more than a passing notice.

At the time of the accident the room was in perfect order; all was quiet about; there was no jar on the floor of the room above. Without the slightest warning it fell as if forced by some unseen power; there must be some secret cause for it, some meaning, some omen for good or evil, and as good results are not generally brought about, as a rule, by such strange accidents, it must necessarily be that evil would come out of such an uncalled-for happening.

After the wreck was cleared away, Elsie seated herself by the window and looked out upon the beautiful scenery around her home. Snow partly covered the ground nearby, but far away to the west the high hills were all white. The bare trees, all stripped of their foliage, presented a somber appearance or picture, yet the bright sun, shining and throwing its rays across the fields and open space before her gaze, made a most beautiful presentation upon which her eyes rested, while her thoughts were busy trying to form some idea who would be affected by the fallen mirror.

Olive was married, she and Guy lived happily; at least they seemed to. She heard from Harry very often, his letters were always filled with the most endearing terms, which gave her great peace of mind and happiness. She could not find any cause for alarm in that direction, she was expecting Harry to see her soon; then she would tell him about the fright and maybe he could give some solution. There was Mr. Chadwick, who as everybody knew in the neighborhood had been in love with Olive, but came too late they all said; he

seemed contented and settled down to business already, although only a short time in Winchester, surely no evil would befall him that would fit the action of "the broken mirror;" at any rate he was not in the immediate family, though in the circle of her acquaintance. But there was another whose name she did not care to have in her mind; he it might be would be the cause of evil, if any should follow the accident. She believed no good of Roy Wallis and when Harry came she would tell him just how he insulted her during his visits at her home; how he had tried to win her away from him. Whenever he came into her mind a frown passed over her face which seemed to take away all the pleasant thoughts of her heart, and now she pictured him as the author of the present unhappiness in some way, how, she could not tell. No more could she tell how the mirror fell from its hangings. Again if she told Harry, he might accuse Roy of his contemptible actions and a quarrel might follow which would end in a tragedy. What to do she did not know. At first she thought to tell her mother and ask her advice; but as she had never acquainted any one with it but Olive, she decided to drive over and see her, and perhaps she could tell if Roy Wallis and the mirror had any influence one over the other.

It was a pleasant winter day overhead, while the traveling was anything but good, not snow enough for sleighing and too much for good wheeling. Elsie had her favorite horse hitched to the little side-bar wagon which she was accustomed to use and drove herself,

reaching Olive's house a little after 2 o'clock in the afternoon. They had just sat down to dinner, in which she joined them, partaking of a hearty meal after her outing in the cool, bracing air. She related the accident to Guy and Olive at the table. They had a hearty laugh over Elsie's scare, yet there was a troubled look which came over Olive's face about it, while Guy made all manner of fun of Elsie concerning it. He said:

"It was only an accident and nothing more; simply the hook pulled out of its place in the wall, and down came the mirror. As to connecting it with any mysterious evil it was the height of foolishness."

"Yes, Guy, that may be true," said Elsie, "and it may not. You know mamma has a horror of such accidents or incidents, or whatever you may fancy to call them. She said it meant death in the family in less than a year."

"Nonsense, Elsie, that is absurd. Your mother has been reading some old superstitious work somewhere, which has filled her mind with the idea; I would have no fear of evil if a dozen broke in my house, as I am not one bit superstitious, I hate it."

Olive started in her seat at the remarks of her husband, she seemed nervous, the conversation was not pleasant to her. While she professed not to believe in signs, yet she showed by her actions that there was something on her mind which the broken mirror had brought to the surface. Her face became flushed while Elsie and Guy talked on about some one dying in the family, until she requested a change of conversation.

"Don't, Elsie," said she, "say anything more about death. You make me shudder, though I don't believe a word of it, yet how horrible if anything should happen—please do not say anything further on the subject."

They arose from the table, Guy going out while the sisters went upstairs to spend an hour or two together.

"Olive, I came over mainly to ask your advice about Roy; that fellow haunts me in my dreams, every time he comes into my mind a dreadful fear seizes me and at times almost overwhelms me. I am half-resolved to tell Harry, when he comes again, I cannot write him, I would rather speak to him face to face about it."

"I think, Elsie, if it troubles you in that way I would most certainly tell Harry and let him settle the matter between himself and Roy at once. But I would not give myself any uneasiness in regard to it; dismiss it from your mind."

"Oh, Olive, I wish I could, I wish I could, you do not know him as I do. Even though my acquaintance with him has been brief, he is so persistent in his attentions, and so personal in his remarks, and looks at me with such a stare, I can see him now with his piercing eyes gazing into mine, he almost (but thank heaven not quite) hypnotized me the last time he was at Twin Oaks. Then, too, he writes such awfully endearing letters."

"What, Elsie, writes letters? Do you correspond with him?"

"No, indeed, I do not, not a line; but he has written

me two or three letters since your wedding and such letters—the knowledge of having them in my possession and Harry's not knowing or even dreaming of such a thing is what troubles me greatly. I have one of them with me which I will read you and then you can better judge whether I am annoyed or not by him.

"BOSTON, Dec.— 18—.

"MY DEAR MISS OAKS: I presume you received my letter which I wrote you a short time ago. I have waited in vain for a reply. I write to-day to ask why you have not written—you already know how much I admire you. In all my experience I have never met one who has gone into my life, whose face and exquisite form are ever before my gaze as yours are; and that, too, without scarcely any encouragement on your part. Just the two brief visits at Twin Oaks have opened unto me a new life—I must speak to you thus, through the medium of this epistle. I desire you to know just my sentiments—my feelings toward you—I pray you to give me a reply, if only a line, tell me if you possess for me the love I hope you do, and if I may be permitted to pay you a visit soon?

"I hope you will pardon my plain remarks, but believe me, it is from a heart filled with deep affection for you.

"I anxiously await your reply.

"Sincerely,

"ROY WALLIS."

"The fool," said Olive, "does he not know that you are already engaged to Harry?"

"Of course he does. I told him that a number of

times, but it doesn't seem to make one bit of difference; he is all the more persistent."

"Doesn't he claim to be a good friend of Harry's?"

"Yes," replied Elsie.

"Then you should tell Harry at once about these letters and about all his impudence to you and treachery to him."

"Oh! Olive, I hate to make trouble between them, and then, too, incur his bitter feeling toward me."

"Pshaw, Elsie, don't be foolish, you cannot allow this to go any further; he is going to make serious trouble for you as sure as you don't settle him at once; if there's no other way, speak to papa and let him take the affair in hand and I'll venture to say he will soon abandon his purpose and leave you alone."

The twins conversed for an hour or more upon the topic and finally concluded that Elsie would inform Harry just how Roy had proceeded from the moment of his introduction to her, coming to Twin Oaks as a friend and as his guest, but proving himself a traitor, using all his power and influence to win Elsie away from one who so dearly loved her and in whom she placed such confidence.

Olive changed the subject suddenly and said: "Elsie, do you really believe in the sign that death is to follow in our family because of the broken mirror? It has been on my mind every moment of the time since you came, in spite of all the conversation we have had on other subjects."

"I hope it is only a whim, Olive, but you know old-

fashioned people say it is true; I have heard it expressed so often, yet I cannot recollect a case ever happening, that I know of, in our neighborhood; let us try and dismiss it from our minds, Olive. I feel much better now since I came over to see you, though I will admit it has troubled me greatly since it happened. Papa is so positive it is only a whim, and Guy so laughs at the idea, that their influence has helped me to be less decided in my opinion."

"Well, I am glad, Elsie, you view it in that way now, for when you came over a few hours ago you were excited over the fact that some destruction was sure to follow—you made me tremble with fear."

Said Elsie, as she rose to go: "I had no idea it was so late, I must be going, Olive, it will soon be dark and I must reach home before then or mamma will be uneasy; you know she is so nervous since our runaway last summer; every time I go out alone she feels uncomfortable until I return."

When Elsie reached her home, she found to her surprise her cousin, a Mrs. Paulding, had arrived during her absence, from the West, to pay them a visit.

Mrs. Oaks had one sister. She married a man by the name of Wood, who lived in Michigan. This cousin was his only child, a young married woman but little older than Elsie, and resembling her greatly in looks, though somewhat larger in form; but her style was much the same; she was as attractive and possessed a very lovable disposition, like her aunt (Mrs. Oaks).

When about sixteen years of age, she fell desperately

in love with a gay young man, a little older than herself—her cousin—whose name was Paulding. For a long time her parents bitterly opposed their keeping company, owing to the relationship which existed between them, but more on account of young Paulding's habits. He was wealthy and spent money with a free hand and lived rather a wild life. But their daughter seemed wonderfully fascinated with him and all their pleading did no good. She was determined to wed him in spite of his dissipated ways. So rather than drive her away from home, they very reluctantly gave their consent, hoping that she might reform him.

Nowhere in that part of the State was there a more fashionable wedding or one more largely attended, than that of Miss Florence Wood. It is not necessary to go into details about the result of her married life; that can be imagined about as well as described, but we merely mention a few of the facts in a general way, to give an idea of how miserable a failure she made of it.

She left the beautiful country home of her childhood, situated in southern Michigan, not far from the present town of Three Rivers, to go into a city at some distance near the middle of the State. Her new home was much larger and on a grander scale. Her husband provided for her every comfort lavishly; every wish was promptly gratified. At first he showed her much attention and devotion, but gradually his love began to cool. He began staying out late at night with his companions, coming home in a maudlin condition, using harsh language, and much abuse, and finally

neglected Florence in every way. Debts began to accumulate owing to his spendthrift habits, his wealth decreased rapidly. First his horses and carriages went, then his business, and eventually he mortgaged his beautiful home heavily to meet the pressing obligations which his dissipation brought upon him.

On he went from one degree to another, plunging deeper into drink and vice, gambling and keeping the company of the bad, until Florence could no longer stand the strain; so she wrote home and confessed the terrible situation to her parents and asked her father to come and bring her home, where she might escape the constant shame and disgrace and abuse of her infuriated husband.

Fortunately no children were born of their union; thus the innocent escaped what might have been an awful inheritance.

At her urgent request, Mr. Wood went to bring her back, but on his arrival there he found her husband had vowed to reform if Florence would only remain. She, the faithful and loving wife, was glad to do anything to help him to overcome his terrible habits and resolved to give him one more chance to keep his promise. Often he had made the most solemn vows to lead a better life, until her patience became exhausted at his failure to keep them.

Mr. Wood decided to stay a few weeks, so sent for his wife that they might be near Florence, and comfort her in case of another outbreak.

The poor fellow did try to overcome his appetite for

strong drink, but it was much like trying to force the stormclouds of the great heavens to move in an opposite direction from their intended course. He fell again and again, after a few weeks of reformation.

The result was an immediate separation. Mr. Wood at once took his daughter home and without any delay made application for a divorce through the courts. When the facts were laid before the proper authorities, there was no hesitancy on the part of the judge in granting the necessary document, which freed her forever from the bonds of matrimony with this awful inebriate. When once she was free her parents planned a trip away for a time, hoping the change would benefit her; for the excitement which she passed through, the agony, fear and constant dread of bodily injury at her husband's hands wore upon her to such an extent that the color was gone from her cheek and her eyes lost much of their brightness.

She hoped coming to Twin Oaks among those she dearly loved, knowing too they loved her, would restore her health, and the unhappiness would wear away in time.

The abuse which she had undergone from her husband had driven the love for him all out of her heart, she cared not one bit for him now and lived only to try and forget him, the suffering and even disgrace which he brought upon her.

So while Elsie was away Florence came unexpected, unannounced, her aunt met her at the door but hardly recognized her at first. When she saw it was her niece

she was most cordially received by both Mrs. and Mr. Oaks. When Elsie returned she was made doubly welcome.

When the family learned of her sad experience they all were in deep sympathy with her and assured her they would do everything possible to make her happy among them. With one of Elsie's nature for a companion, all the love and fascination of her former life would return in due season, as time covered the distance between the home she left and her present abode.

While the experience of the past few years had been such a dismal failure and had so saddened her life, yet her strong will power enabled her to hope and take courage and put faith in her Heavenly Father, that He would smooth her pathway and that it would not always be so thorny and full of unpleasantness. The moment she was away from the influence of her husband it was the beginning of the restoration of peace. Her own father's house was a place of rest and joy to her, yet there lingered around her memory many unpleasant reminiscences of the days gone by—prior to and after her unity with the man who almost ruined her young life. One object and another would recall his memory in such a manner that she found it difficult to get away from the fact. Thus the visit to Twin Oaks; for she knew in this household no mention of the past would be made and no face that was familiar in her history would be seen. She could learn to forget the bitterness which her life had been associated with, for new experiences would now come into

her soul; the sunshine and happiness of Elsie and the family would hasten the return of those feelings which are essential in making a life peaceful.

While a guest of the Oaks she wanted to share her room with Elsie, for then they could be all the closer companions, and the love they already possessed for each other would grow deeper, and in their intimacy her sorrow would be healed the sooner.

They sat and talked until late that evening and Florence related to Elsie all about her trip from the West, and how she so surprised them all. At first she dreaded to come and bring her sorrows to them; but her parents urged her, knowing they all would help her in her trouble; finally she made the journey. Never having traveled alone before, she did so with many doubts and misgivings, fearing she could not find her way, but fortunately she encountered no difficulty whatever. Elsie told her how it came that she happened to be away when she arrived—about the broken mirror—early in the day, how it had been on her mind ever since; but as Florence did not believe in whims or old sayings or superstition, the fact did not make much impression upon her mind, and when the truth dawned upon Elsie that she, too, did not believe in the fatality of the accident, she began to settle down to an opinion that it was only a happening and nothing more, and perhaps she had been foolish to allow herself to be worked up to such a degree, owing to the probable result of what might follow, from its breaking sooner or later.

Notwithstanding the belief of one and another, or that they laughed at Elsie's fright—Guy saying she was foolish and her papa criticizing her folly, yet Elsie was right. Whether the mirror had anything to do with it or not, no one knows, yet a death followed—a calamity befell them within a year's time—one which shocked the neighborhood and settled the fact in their minds, that the accidental breaking of a mirror is a bad omen and foretells a terrible fate for some member of the family within a given time. "He laughs best who laughs last."

CHAPTER VIII.

AN UNFORTUNATE STEP.

FOR some reasons it would be well if one could lift the veil and look ahead—it would save many a misstep, many a heart-ache—but the Divine Providence who rules over us creatures has ordered it differently. We must wait to know what the morrow has in store for us. We so often wish we could look into the future, yet, perhaps, it is better, taking all into consideration, that we cannot know what good or evil may be awaiting us.

The character we are writing about in this chapter was one possessed of a nature that was quick to act, presumptuous, very impulsive. No sooner would a thought enter his mind than he at once proceeded to carry it into effect, no matter whether it was with good judgment or not, so long as his heart's desire was gratified. Born and reared in the city, accustomed to the exciting scenes of city life, surrounded by the comforts and conveniences of a delightful home, where his taste and appetite could be satisfied because of the great variety in which the city abounds, inexperienced to a country life other than visiting it at short intervals, he was not aware of the vast change that a permanent home in the country brought to the individual.

There is an old saying and a proverbial one, "where the heart is there the treasure is also." His visits to Winchester had been few, perhaps two or three times a year; then to stay only a day or so to visit his uncle and aunt, the Sargents. He found no particular attraction there beyond the pleasure of the company of his relatives and such enjoyment as he picked up in their pretty country home. When there, usually he did not go about in the little village, but spent his time around the fruit farm of his uncle, during that portion of the year which was favorable to outdoor life.

Mr. Sargent had often told him that there were many young and attractive ladies in Winchester, some of them exceptionally pretty, but it did not seem to arouse his interest, whether because he had an idea the country could not afford fascinating and charming women, equally as nice as the city, or whether he thought his uncle's idea was vague on the subject.

> "There is a time in a man's life,
> He knows not when or where,
> That marks his future destiny
> To glory or despair."

What a change came over Van Courtland Chadwick, the proud young city gentleman who had been dined and entertained by the *élite* of the great metropolis where he lived, when he met his fate in an unexpected moment on the memorable evening when Olive and Guy came to call on his uncle, and he, just from the city, strolled into the yard, his coming unnoticed until the

click of the gate as it shut behind him attracted their attention. The half-hour's conversation with this lovely girl opened his eyes and heart to a new life.

Winchester now was a delightful place to him, the air was so pure, the water cool, the people intelligent and interesting. He found the city less attractive when he returned; his health began to fail him, the water was impure, the air foul, the streets seemed narrow, and the houses so pent-up. He longed for country life. The excuses that a man will offer or bring to bear upon the subject of his heart, in order to justify himself is something wonderful. He had just discovered that the great city was not to be compared with so lovely a place as the little rural town of Winchester. It had neat homes, spacious yards, old-fashioned but beautiful churches, wide streets, and so many comforts which the city did not possess. Why had he not gone there to live? His uncle was right; it had many pretty girls; it had one who was even more so than the rest—Olive, the wife of another now. So attracted was he to Winchester that he bought a store in the heart of the town and engaged in mercantile life that he might be near Olive. He could see her every day. Though she could never be more to him than she was now, a friend, yet it would give him much happiness to gaze into those eyes ever and anon from behind the counter of his store, while engaged in the selling of his goods and chattels. He had no impure thoughts in his mind relative to her, but desired to be near her; that would be some gratification and appease, in a measure, his great disappoint-

ment, in what he had hoped to gain in the winning of her heart to the extent of breaking off with Guy. So he settled there regardless of the sacrifice of all his social pleasure, of the loss of the society of so many charming young ladies who moved in his circle; they were all cast aside for the occasional sight of the one he loved.

What perhaps influenced him to take this step was the fact that he knew Olive loved him; she had told him so in all her fond glances, in all her actions, and even in plain words. Yet he could gain nothing by it. Olive was married, he could not ask her to meet him and take long walks as before; he could only see her as she came to the village, or visited the store to make purchases, for it was the custom of the people in Winchester to attend to buying household supplies themselves, rather than trust it to servants. Wealth in the family did not change the law which had been in force since the very foundation of the place. The first settlers were plain people, and their descendants followed on in their footsteps in all matters pertaining to the management of household affairs.

It was late in the fall before he had fully settled in his new business, buying out an old-established concern. The head of it having suddenly died, left it to his widow; she being without any sons to carry it on, made the sale. Coming at a time when Van was in the humor of locating there, he made the purchase on the impulse of the moment. He was entirely ignorant of the business—that is, this class of business, though he

had had some experience with the world. About the only real qualifications that he did claim toward the management of any trade was plenty of capital. Regardless of the expense, he hired a good man to look after the buying of the goods, besides one clerk who had worked for his predecessor. This man was somewhat younger than himself, yet one well-versed in the wants of a general store in the country, a stranger to him, though highly recommended for the position, coming from a nearby town about ten miles distant, a place much larger than Winchester—Allandale—another one of those beautiful country towns so numerous in that section. The principal attraction in Allandale was the college, a large, commodious, old-fashioned building, accommodating both sexes to the number of three hundred or more, owned and managed by the principal, Dr. King, who was widely known throughout that valley. His reputation as an instructor was of the best. He had one son, Spence King, who at the time of this story was less than twenty-five years of age, and he it was whom Van employed to manage his store. As this young man is one of the important links in the chain of our story, it is necessary to introduce the reader to him just now.

He was not handsome, rather medium in build, a regular blonde, mild in his manner, very agreeable in conversation, well educated, though not thoroughly refined; the country life and its associations had so grown in and around his nature, there was not that refinement which a man possesses who has been accus-

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tomed to the society which the city affords. His blue eyes, his fresh complexion, and well-curled mustache gave to him an appearance which was pleasing to the public, he being very popular in Allandale, and even well-known in Winchester. No better choice could Van have made to make his business a success, for he possessed good ability, a clear head, and a speculative turn of mind.

In buying the stock of goods he also bought the building, made some alterations within, painted the outside, and placed a large, attractive sign in front, "Van Courtland Chadwick Dealer in General Merchandise." The improvements within and without added greatly to the show of the store, made it more presentable in appearance. The general agreeableness of Van, the sociability of Spence, together with his acquaintanceship, the good location and long-established reputation of the old stand, assured him positive success from the start.

Then, too, rumor had it that young Chadwick wanted Olive Oaks and Olive Oaks wanted him, but he came too late. There was a natural inquisitiveness which led people to see him, for he had been the subject of much gossip prior to Olive's marriage. So one after another of the fruit farmers of the vicinity and the townspeople came to his store on the excuse at first of buying some small article; some of the oldest characters in looks as well as actions. The evening brought out a larger crowd generally than the daytime.

"Old man Wilson was dead and his widow had sold out to a New Yorker," they said. "Didn't believe he

would amount to much, but as he had hired Spence King to run the store guess it would be all right." From day to day as they met him in conversation and trade; they were so well-pleased with him that they came again, told all their neighbors what a fine young man he was, his goods were the best, and prices low. Olive Oaks, John Hills, and the Sargents all patronized him; the latter, of course on account of relationship, if for no other reason. The fact that the best families traded with him was sufficient to advertise him far and near.

A few weeks after his removal there he bought some ground and commenced the erection of a house, and that started the gossipers of the village. It mado them uneasy; they speculated as to who would occupy this beautiful house, for such it was to be if report was correct. His parents were both dead; the only near relatives he had were the Sargents. Why would he, a single man, want to build a house? They prophesied that a New York lady would be his wife soon, no doubt, and it was for her, he was building the house. Surely he must have many acquaintances there where he was brought up, and no doubt the people of Winchester were not good enough for him to select a wife from now that Olive was married. They would be good enough to trade with him in business; as to marrying among them, no indeed!

As the weeks flew by and the frame of the building rose, showing its size with its additions and wings, it became the talk of the town. Some went so far as to

hint to Van about it, but he kept his own counsel relative to it. While he would laugh when talking about it, yet he would not give any satisfactory answer as to who would live there. The nearer it came toward completion the more beautiful was its appearance. It was modern in all its appointments, spacious in its size, built entirely of wood, as were most of the houses in and about Winchester, with wide piazza, adorned with much fancy and beaded work, painted in colors to give the house life and attractiveness, to please the eye as well—in its plans every comfort of the occupants was well provided for.

We will pass over a month or two, which brings us to the beautiful June days, a delightful time of the year.

The past six months had brought a great change to Van. His mode of life was different since he met Olive. He had settled down now to a regular routine of life; business cares had already become interesting to him. Spence King was a sure success. Under his management the business had increased over the last half-year as conducted by John Wilson, the former owner, that was exceedingly encouraging to him. His affairs generally were in a prosperous condition, his new house about completed, and he stood at ease with the world at large except for the fascination which Olive had for him, realizing to him anything but happiness. He would have been happy with these avenues of prosperity opening up to him on all sides, had not his miserable state of mind offset it. He just began to see his mistake in coming to Winchester to live.

One day in the early part of the month, as Van sat in his little office near the front of the store, smoking a cigar, enjoying the cool breeze as it swept through the store, for the doors and windows were all open, suddenly in walked Olive, blushing and radiant with smiles. Van rose somewhat embarrassed, for he was not expecting her just at that time. Her sudden appearance seemed to frustrate him, yet her coming always brought a delight to him. She had been to his place many times since she became Mrs. Hills. She found it necessary to visit the place often in the buying of her household supplies. Her oft-repeated coming did not provoke any particular comment, because Van was scarcely ever seen away from his business; his close attention to it won for him a good name. The gossip of the fall before, when their names were coupled together, was apparently forgotten by the wagging tongues of the villagers.

"I have come, Van, to ask you and Spence to my first lawn party. We are going to have a delightful time, Saturday afternoon and evening. I shall be so happy to have you both come, but if business must keep one of you away, why you come, please do, and let Spence come after he closes the store."

"Why, Olive, I don't know as I ought to come, you know——"

"Hush! Van, you must. I have made the party almost for you," whispering in a low tone.

"Oh, well, if that is the case, Olive, I will certainly come."

As their eyes met he felt the same beating of his heart against his breast as of old; the same strange feeling came over him; his face flushed, and he gave a great sigh.

"What would Guy say if he knew you made the party for me?"

"Ha! ha! Guy! Well, do not let that trouble you. Van, he does not know my thoughts; if he did he would never have married me; but, of course, that is confidential. I must be hurrying on, I have so many places to visit. Oh! I must ask Spence or he will never forgive me."

"By the way, Olive, I guess you and Spence are quite friends. I notice you seem to enjoy his company so much when you are here."

"Certainly we are. You know he took a course through his father's college when Elsie and I did, and there we formed quite an acquaintanceship; besides from the first I admired him in many ways, he is so very amiable."

"Yes, he is very polite to all the ladies; it is his nature."

"You are not jealous, Van, I hope? Ha! ha! you jealous of me, Van, why I am astonished."

"Oh! my, no! Olive, I am not jealous of any one."

"Not any one, Van?"

"Yes, Olive, I must contradict myself—one, only one."

"Who, may I ask?"

"*I cannot* say now, Olive, but you can guess."

She looked at him with her large, beautiful eyes, and saw he was in earnest. She quickly guessed who. With a sigh she turned partly around as if to go, hesitated a moment, and then said, "Good-by."

"Oh! Spence," said she, as she went to the other end of the store, where he was writing at his desk, "I have come to invite you to my party on our lawn next Saturday evening. I hope you can come."

"Well, Olive, I don't know. I presume Van is going, and you know we cannot both go."

"You must come if you get there a little late. I shall be very much disappointed if you do not. I have made this party for all my friends, and that means you, too."

"Thank you, I will come if possible."

"You do not come to see us any more; you used to visit Twin Oaks, but I never see you now only as I come here to trade, so I shall surely expect you"

"Your time and attention belong to another now, Olive, and many of your gentlemen friends realize that, and thus do not feel as free to call as in bygone days, however, we will hope to have a good time at the party."

"Yes, indeed, I hope you will. Good-by."

As Olive passed by where Van was seated, she stopped to say a word. She noticed that he seemed to be in a great study; but immediately his face was all smiles as she approached him. Before he could say a word she said to him in a low tone: "Do you remem-

ber, Van, what you said to me the night of my wedding? I have never forgotten it."

"Haven't you, Olive?"

"No—farewell for the present."

Out the door she went, up the street, and was soon lost to sight, but not so quickly out of the mind of Van.

Spence strolled down to the front of the store where Van was still seated musing. "Van," said he, "Mrs. Hills is very lively, and a most delightful person to meet; don't you think so?"

"Yes, indeed I do, Spence. How long have you known the family?"

"Oh my, I have known the Oaks all my life, but not very intimately. Living only a few miles from them, we often met out at parties, and when I went through college the girls were both there. I used to be quite friendly with the family, have been at Twin Oaks many times. Of the two my choice was always Elsie, as she seemed to be lively and gay without overdoing it in the least."

"What do you you mean by overdoing it?"

"Why, I mean Olive is something of a flirt. While I cannot speak against her, yet she seems to make confidants of so many. I have noticed, too, she does not seem to think as much of her husband as she should. Of course, that may be my opinion only."

Van's face flushed at his remarks. He sat so that Spence could not see it. He bit his lip to keep from replying just then. Presently he said:

"*You think* she doesn't love Guy?"

"Well, she may love him, but if she does sincerely she has rather a singular way of showing it. When they are out together I have noticed it—others have, too, before and since their marriage."

Just then several customers came in and broke up their conversation. Van sat and thought for a few moments, then picked up a paper and tried to read, but he could not confine his thoughts to any one article. He wandered about through the columns of the paper, and finding nothing interesting, laid it down, arose, and went behind one of the counters endeavoring to distract his mind by waiting on customers.

Before him were a man and his wife who lived several miles back in the country in a place not thickly settled; their appearance was rough and their manner uncultivated, yet they were clever people to meet.

"I hear," said the man, "you've got a fine house."

"Yes, sir," said Van, "I have, or will have when it's completed."

"You hain't married?" said the woman.

"No," said Van, with a little laugh. "I am not."

"Wall, there are lots of nice girls around here; you ought to find a wife for such a fine house as they say you've got."

"Oh! I am in no hurry to marry."

"That may be so, Mr. Chadwick, but you'll want a good housekeeper, I am sure. You haven't met our daughter Alice, have you?"

"No, I have not had that pleasure. Is she with you to-day?"

"Alice! Alice!" said the woman, "come here."

She addressed her conversation to a young girl who stood gazing at some goods in a showcase on the opposite side of the store. Her daughter immediately responded to her call, and with a swaying step came over to be introduced to the new merchant.

"Alice, this is Mr. Chadwick, whom you have heard your pa say so much about."

The young girl extended her long, bony hand to take Van's, which he proffered to her with some reluctance. He thought to himself as he did so: "I have got to have some diplomacy about me, I suppose, if I am going to get trade here, so I will make myself as agreeable as possible."

Then addressing Alice he said: "I am very happy to make your acquaintance, Miss—Miss——"

"Miss Ruger," said the man, with his face all aglow at the thought that Alice was so well received by the merchant.

"Don't say Miss Ruger to our daughter, Mr. Chadwick," spoke up the mother, looking through her steel-framed glasses at Van. Her face, too, was full of pleasantness at the success of the introduction, for they had talked of it for a week previous. When they heard how attractive this new storekeeper was, and that he was rich and unmarried, and building a new house, they pictured Alice as its mistress, for they verily believed she would be sought after at once if she was only introduced.

The girl was countrified enough, tall and angular,

though rather fair of face, but not of form. She had gray eyes, not cold in expression, teeth somewhat uneven and large. When she talked or laughed they showed plainly, which did not add to her beauty.

Van could scarcely keep from smiling at the cool nerve the family displayed in their introduction to himself. While it annoyed him a little, he seemed to enjoy it withal.

"I guess you don't visit Winchester very often?" said Van to the young lady. "I have been here some time and do not remember having seen you or your parents before to-day."

"No, we don't," said Alice.

Said Mrs. Ruger: "We been tradin' at Kelder's Crossing for the last ten years, and hardly ever come to Winchester, it is such a long drive, but when we heard as how you had such a big store and such nice goods, Alice wanted to come and trade here."

"Well, my store is no larger now than when Wilson had it," said Van.

"It isn't?" said Mr. Ruger, looking around at the size of it.

"Yes, but they say you keep better goods than Wilson did and give better weights and measures, too," spoke up Alice.

"Hush, Alice, how dare you speak that way of the dead?" said her mother.

"Thank you, Miss Alice, I am glad I have already won a good reputation for honesty; that goes a good ways in this life toward building up a successful business."

Alice hung her head at the compliment, or very pleasant reply which Van gave her. Because of the severe rebuke which her mother bestowed upon her, she was so ashamed that she could not look him in the face. He saw the situation at a glance.

"Mrs. Ruger, I don't think your daughter intended to speak ill of Mr. Wilson in regard to his weights and measures; she simply remarked what has been public talk, that is all, for I heard that report long ago."

Alice then looked up and smiled sweetly at Van for his kind words.

Van chatted away with the family as he waited on them, spending perhaps more than an hour with them. Both Mr. and Mrs. Ruger, as well as Alice, felt well-acquainted with him before they left the store. Country folks easily form acquaintances; as a rule, formality is unknown to them, and in this case they rather forced acquaintanceship, for they had an express object in view, little realizing the uselessness of their effort. However, they returned to their home wonderfully pleased with the new merchant, promising him to do all their trading there in the future, which, of course, he was delighted to hear. His easy manner and politeness captivated the trio, who were happy in the thought that their visit was so profitable and so full of satisfaction.

"Well, Spence, I am tired," said Van, after the Rugers had gone. "Of all presuming people I ever met in my life they are up head. They insisted on my dining up to 'Log Hollow,' where they live and spending Sunday. Ha! ha! ha! The idea."

"Did you say you would go, Van?"

"Indeed, I did not, Winchester is a better place to stay on a Sabbath day than 'Log Hollow,' I should judge, if they are specimens of its inhabitants. Of course, they are clever people, Spence, but as to my going up there, they are too kind entirely."

"Rather short acquaintance to make a visit on, too, Van, except it was in a case where your heart was deeply interested, then you might find an excuse to go."

"Yes, true enough," replied he, as he resumed his seat in the little office by the door.

How different the time when he met Olive in the evening at his uncle's, when all the night through she was upon his mind. As the days followed one another, he lived with her name and face constantly before him, only to find while she loved him she had promised her heart to another; but that was all over now, it was past and he must not live it again.

Presently Spence returned from another part of the store and said: "Well, what about the party; are you going?"

"Yes, I am going. I think it will be quite an affair. I need a little change from this sort of monotonous life, for really I begin to find mercantile life quite confining."

"You keep indoors too much. You ought to be out in the open air more. You know this part of the country is famous for its invigorating air."

"While I know that is all true, yet I don't feel that I have the time to spare."

"You must make time, Van; health first, you know.

After you get this party off your hands, I would advise buying a good span of horses and riding about the country; it will do you a power of good."

"I think that's a good idea, Spence, I can buy a team of Uncle Sargent. I know he has one for sale, and while I have the opportunity I will slip up there now and see if I can make a bargain; if so, I can drive out to the party in my own conveyance."

With that impulsiveness which characterized his whole life, he put on his hat and started at once to see his uncle. As he went out with a rush, up the street, around the corner toward his uncle's house, Spence remarked to himself:

"Queer man that Van. He has something on his mind besides business, I am sure, for so often I find him in such deep meditation. Then to start right off on the jump at my suggestion, without stopping for a moment to count the cost, is singular enough. I don't quite understand him yet."

Van reached Mr. Sargent's house just in time to meet Olive coming out of the front door. She had been there to invite them to the lawn party. At the sight of her he forgot his errand. She took a seat upon the piazza and he followed suit. Olive seemed to have something she wished to say to him, but just how to say it was a source of embarrassment to her although one would not have supposed so judging from her nature.

"I hope you will come to my party, Van," said she.

"Ah! sure, Olive, I could not do otherwise after giving you my promise," said he smilingly.

"If I get a good opportunity there I have something I wish to say to you, and—it—must—be—private."

As she said these words she leaned forward, bending close to him, and almost whispered, and looked around from one side to another to see if any one was near.

"Can't you say it now, Olive?"

"Oh, no, Van, I cannot," in the samo low whisper.

"Yes, but don't you realize that you will have to entertain your guests, and you will have no time to converse with any one in a secret corner, much less with me, and that, too, in the presence of your husband?"

"Oh! pshaw, my husband. I am not afraid of him."

"Yes, but it might cause comment. There will be lots of people there who would enjoy starting a gossip about us if they had the slightest opportunity."

"Don't I visit your store often; why don't they gossip about that?"

"True, but you have some excuse to come there, besides when in there you are not watched by a multitude as you will be at the party."

"I will be careful to arrange that so they will not see us."

"Even so, Olive, I would not consent to act unwisely. Though my heart may urge me on, my conscience would have the greater power. While I am quick and impulsive in my nature, yet there are some things in which I act with discretion and much deliberation, though my friends do not give me credit for possessing any such qualities. I think if you have anything to

say, now is the proper time. You know I am in business here, and I must preserve my reputation, above all things, if I would be successful." He then moved his chair closer to Olive, and added almost in a whisper: "I would have done anything to gain you several months ago, but you know now it is all over—not my desire for you, oh, no, that never—God knows, but it is all over as far as any possibility of ever claiming you as my own is concerned; and it is a great temptation for me to look into your beautiful eyes, Olive, and realize they are another's—your heart and——"

"Hush! Van, please do not speak more now, I cannot bear it; my heart is aching; your words cut like a knife. What you said to me just before I entered the carriage which bore me away shortly after my marriage, last October, all come back to me now. I have never forgotten those words, Van, I never will. You were cruel to say what you did, knowing the situation."

"Even so, Olive. I was greatly agitated at the time. The circumstances, the regret for what might have been, the great love which yet I had not gained, but somehow all along I had hoped for, all lost to me. I spoke hastily, I know. If I remember rightly it was these words: 'Olive, you have been false to-day, false to Guy and to me, false to your God; you will think of what I say when you are alone, I hope you will be happy, but—you—never—will—be; it is I you should have married to-day, and not Guy Hills.' Those were my exact words. I felt that I must speak my heart to you then once for all."

Olive sat in silence, the tears streaming down her face, her little hands clinched tightly together, her eyes cast down as he spoke. The only sign that she was conscious of his words was the deep flush on her face. Afterward when she raised her head there was a peculiar look out of her beautiful eyes, and as they met the gaze of Van the flush became even crimson. Her voice faltered as she attempted to reply to him:

"My married life has been anything but happy to me. I confess it to you and you alone. Guy is good, kind, and loving, but he can never fill the place in my affections such as my heart demands. He is too matter of fact, too easy. He never opposes me in anything. Life needs some opposition, all sunshine and no clouds grows monotonous. I love excitement; I love character, passion, and some spirit—a change now and then from the mere routine of everyday life. I have tried to be contented, but I am not. Oh! Van, forgive me, but why did you not come to Winchester long before?"

"Olive! Olive! that won't do. You must not give way to your feelings in that manner. Remember you are a married woman. You know now we can only be friends. It is too late to talk of the past except to profit by it. Your duty ought to be clear to you. You should exercise your will power. You have strong likes and dislikes, but you must not give way to the wrong; but force the opposing nature to harmonize with that of your husband. You are making yourself miserable by allowing the seed of discontent to gain a place in your mind and heart. It will surely bring you further

unhappiness. Love your husband as no doubt he loves you; give him in return affection and devotion. Cast aside all other thoughts and live to make him happy, and wherein you have made mistakes, they will be covered by the growth of love in your own heart for him. I think, too, Olive, we ought not to converse further on the subject. I thank you for your confidence and I promise it shall remain a secret with me."

Van arose as if to go in search of his uncle, and with reluctance Olive started to go down the steps of the porch. Her eyes were full of tears, her step seemed uncertain, she put out her hand to say good-by. With aching heart and trembling lips she managed to say:

"I hope to see you, Van, at the party on Saturday. Good-by."

The subject of horses had all been driven out of his mind by this conversation. He met his uncle, and was greeted with one of his religious salutations.

"Good morning, uncle, are you feeling well to-day?"

"Splendid, my son, and at peace with all men; 'Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on thee, because he trusteth in thee.' Isaiah xxvi., iii."

"I am glad to find you in such peace of mind, uncle, not every one can say that verse which you just repeated with sincerity."

"That is so, Van. By the way, where did Olive go? I saw you talking with her on the piazza."

"She has gone home, I presume. Are you going to their party on Saturday?"

"Well, yes, I guess your aunt and I will go. Of course you are invited?"

"Yes, certainly, and I hope to go if I can get away from the store. No doubt we will all have a very enjoyable time. I called up to see you about buying that team which you have for sale, but as I have been away so long from the store I won't have time; soon as I get the opportunity I want a drive behind them."

"Very well, any time you are ready come and the horses will be at your service."

"Perhaps to-morrow, uncle; I must be going now. Good afternoon."

When Van reached his store he found Spence busy waiting on customers. He proceeded at once to render assistance, and for more than an hour he was actively engaged looking after trade, which relieved his mind somewhat. When all had gone and quiet was again restored, he seated himself in his easy-chair in the little office by the door, lit a cigar and just began to enjoy a rest and a smoke when a hackman stopped in front of his store, a man alighted from the vehicle, paid his fare, and said something to the driver, looked up at the sign over the door and walked in. Van rose to meet him. The stranger put out his hand to take Van's. They both smiled. It was Roy Wallis.

CHAPTER IX.

THE LAWN PARTY.

GUY HILLS had a pleasant country home. Though in no way to be compared with Twin Oaks, yet it was decidedly pretty; the grounds were not extensive, but enough so to give them a beautiful lawn. It was not a new place, one that he bought just after his marriage with Olive.

The previous owner had spent much time and money in beautifying the premises, so when Guy came into possession of the property he found it in perfect order, and was proud to present to Olive a home so complete, even though much smaller than her own; yet sufficiently large enough for a young couple just starting out in life.

A few miles from Twin Oaks, and about an equal distance from Winchester, upon a lovely spot back from the public road stood the house; not in a lonely location such as you so often find country homes in, but in full view of many prominent farmhouses of the vicinity.

The day previous to the party the Pendletons arrived at Twin Oaks, much to the delight of Elsie and her cousin Florence. Mrs. Wood had been a resident now of Twin Oaks for several months, and in the meantime *had met Harry* Pendleton a few times, and found him

to be a charming young man, and one she greatly admired. She congratulated Elsie on her choice.

Elsie had intended to inform Harry about the actions of Roy Wallis upon his first visit to her home, but he came and went two or three times and yet she had not found an opportunity or possessed the courage to tell him. Within a few hours after his arrival there he went with Elsie for a drive over to Olive's when, a short distance on their journey in a bend of the road driving along at a rapid gait, who should they meet in a buggy, driving his horse still faster, but Roy Wallis. He lifted his hat, and with a broad smile bowed his head very low.

"Where did he come from, Harry?" said Elsie.

"I am sure I cannot tell you, Elsie. This is the first time I have seen him. He did not come with us today, and I was not aware he was here."

"I don't like that man, Harry; pardon the expression, for he claims to be a friend of yours. He is entirely too presumptuous. In fact he is full of deceit and treachery."

"Why, Elsie, what do you mean? Please explain yourself. I thought he was quite a nice fellow, and really a friend indeed."

"You think so, Harry. Well, please read this letter and then tell me what your opinion is of him." She handed him the letter which she had read to Olive. With much surprise and astonishment he commenced to read it, handing Elsie the reins.

She watched the expression of his countenance as best

she could, while handling the lines and guiding the horse who now had slowed his gait to a moderate trot. His face flushed at first, then became almost bloodless, the muscles of his face twitched, he bit his lips. Unknowingly a flash of anger passed over his countenance; he folded the letter up slowly and handed it back to Elsie.

"The scoundrel, I'll fix him when we meet again."

"Oh! Harry, please do not make any scene for my sake. I am afraid of him; he will do something desperate."

"There will be no scene, Elsie; but I must speak to him. Do you suppose that I will have you insulted in this way by that scamp? And then the foul treachery to me. Oh! why haven't you told me of this before?"

Elsie then explained the whole matter to him from the beginning. The expression of rage was simply awful that passed over his face as she related to him the story.

"Long ago I would have told you, Harry, but I thought by treating him coolly he would cease his attentions to me, and thus avoid any difficulty between you two, but he seems so persistent I am forced to tell you."

"I presume he will be at the lawn party to-morrow evening."

"Oh, no, Olive knows all about him and his actions, and I know did not invite him."

"Yes, but what is he doing here just at this time if he is not invited?"

"I haven't the slightest idea. I do not know when he came, nor anything concerning him since the receipt of his last letter, which I will show you when we return home."

Their conversation the rest of the journey was solely upon this topic, and even after reaching Olive's home it was discussed all over again, for to their astonishment they found he had been there for a call, and was on his way back when they met him.

The day Roy arrived in town he heard from Van about the party, but was very much surprised at not receiving an invitation. He had some business which called him to Winchester; it just so happened he came at this time. Believing for some cause, or through a mistake, his invitation had not reached him, or his name had been overlooked, he made an excuse to go and make a short call upon Olive, hoping thereby she would invite him to come, as he would make it plain to her that he would be in Winchester for a few days.

It was a bright idea, and it worked admirably. Finding Olive out on the lawn giving directions to those who were engaged in arranging it for the party, he took her by great surprise. She tried to be a little cool to him at first, but to one of her nature it was quite impossible. So full of deceit herself, she forgot all about how he had acted toward Elsie, while pretending to be a true friend of Harry's, or how she had advised Elsie to use him.

He was so gallant and suave in his manner, while she was much the same, that they seemed to enjoy the hour

very much in conversation, and in walking about the place. It was his first visit in that locality, and, of course, he professed to be deeply interested in her lovely home, and praised and commented upon it in a flattering manner, all of which apparently delighted Olive.

She must not let him know that purposely his name was left off the list of invitations, so she said in an off-handed manner.

"I see you are on hand early for the party."

Instantly he thought maybe she has mailed me an invitation, and it has been lost in transit.

"Yes, indeed I am, I couldn't miss that, you know," said he smilingly.

"I sent all my invitations out early so as to give those coming from a distance ample time."

"How kind of you, Mrs. Hills. It will give me great pleasure to come, I assure you. I am very fond of these little outings in the country."

"I hope all you people will enjoy yourselves when here to-morrow evening," said Olive, as he bade her adieu and drove away in his buggy with a merry heart at his successful call.

Olive told the story of Roy's unexpected call to Elsie and Harry as if it had been very displeasing to her; how he happened to be riding by her home and finding her on the lawn stopped for a chat. "Learning of the party he evinced great surprise and affected an air of keen disappointment, not particularly in words, in manner. After he informed me he expected to be in Winchester a few days I had to invite him or seem rude."

Elsie was quite indignant at Olive's inviting him after knowing of his unprincipled actions, and in Harry's mind it only corroborated his first analysis of her character. With ready tact he changed the subject, and after a short call they drove home. For Elsie's sake he did not criticise the actions of Olive, but pleasantly remarked:

"I presume we will have to make the best of it, though it will be anything but pleasant for you. I have no fears for myself, for I shall meet him as he deserves to be met. I shall speak very plainly to him, and if he gives me any impudence I will thrash him without mercy."

"Oh! please, Harry, do not lay hands on him. Speak to him as you like, but I pray you do not make trouble for us all by any battle between yourselves, unless it be a battle of words. Just think what excitement it would make, and then everybody would know what now is a private matter. No one knows of his actions but Olive and Guy, Florence and yourself. I have kept it a secret from mamma and papa because I did not want to bother them with such affairs, and give them any worry over what I hoped to be able to settle myself."

"You are very considerate, Elsie; too much so for your own good, I am afraid. You should have told me at the first, then we would have escaped the difficulty which we may encounter to-morrow evening. However, you did it for the best, no doubt, and now we wil settle the matter as easily as possible. Do not give yourself any further uneasiness in regard to it, and I

promise you I will not make any disturbance in dealing with him. When I meet him what I do will be done in a gentlemanly way, but in such a manner that he will thoroughly understand me, and in the future cease to annoy you."

On the night of the party we find the lawn gayly decorated with Chinese lanterns. Temporary summer-houses or booths were erected here and there with seats for eight or ten people each. Lemonade, ice cream, and cake stands were supplied; everything of the kind to satisfy the appetite and quench the thirst of the many guests, all free as the air, to those who were fortunate enough to be bidden to tho outdoor feast.

The evening was a beautiful summer's night, clear and balmy. A bright moon shone in the heavens above, which, with the artificial lights upon the grounds, made the place wonderfully bright. The guests began to arrive at an early hour, for the invitations were for the afternoon and evening.

We see many familiar faces there that we saw at Olive's wedding, only a larger crowd. Olive had been generous in her invitations; many who would have been glad to receive an invitation to her wedding, but did not, availed themselves of this opportunity and came; thus the guests of the lawn party were more cosmopolitan and democratic than those of the wedding, for the former were confined more to a set circle of friends and relatives, while the latter were more general.

In order to take care of the guests it was necessary to

have a good many employed for that purpose. Among the number of helpers Olive had secured the services of the Ruger family, Mr. Ruger to look after the horses and carriages, Mrs. Ruger to superintend the general supper, while Alice had full charge of the stands for cream and cake.

Early in the evening mother Ruger caught sight of Van upon the lawn. She hastened to greet him, for she still held pleasant memories of her recent visit at his store when she imagined she had made such a favorable impression, and had succeeded in charming him to a certain extent by the introduction of her lovely daughter, Alice. At least that was her opinion. Hence the sight of him was all that was necessary to again bring before her mind the fact that Alice was there and would be pleased to see him. Van could not do otherwise than be polite—his usual way—and said: he would be glad to see her daughter when an opportunity afforded.

"I'll take you to her now," said Mrs. Ruger, as she led the way to where Alice was giving orders to others to carry out certain work.

Van followed, and in meeting Alice she extended her hand quickly to him, saying: "Why, Mr. Chadwick, I am so glad to see you," smiling all over her face. Mrs. Ruger, too, looked wonderfully pleased and happy as she gazed on the scene.

It was with the greatest difficulty imaginable that Van succeeded in getting away from the two, despite the fact that both had duties which were urgent upon them, calling them in different directions in order to make their

rôles a success. Finally he was relieved by Olive, who with several others came up to where Van was standing. Not knowing anything concerning the Rugers' forced acquaintanceship she asked him to join them in their walk. Excusing himself to Alice and her mother, he was only too glad to depart.

Olive managed it so in their walking about the lawn with her friends that she was next to Van, and while they all were chatting away she said in a low tone to him: "Can't you meet me on the north end of the piazza in a few moments? I wish to speak to you privately, as I told you the other evening at Mr. Sargent's?"

"Oh, no, Olive. Much as I would like to, I do not think I ought to. You see this is a very public place; that is, the piazza is, and there are many eyes around. Besides you are a married woman; if we are seen conversing privately alone in a corner, comment will surely be made upon it to our detriment."

"I know, Van; that may be all true, but we will not be observed there, the lights do not shine with sufficient brightness to discern who may be seated there, and for a few minutes we will not be missed from the lawn. Besides this is my party, and my home, and I have a right to ask you to join me in conversation if I wish, and I do not care what any one may say."

"I do, though, Olive. I must refuse you, but, oh, how I hate to do so."

Before Olive could make any reply to his remark they came face to face with Roy Wallis, who was talking very earnestly with young Bixby, the postmaster's son,

Van was delighted to have an excuse to change the subject, so invited them to join their party in their promenade around the lawn. Olive seeing just then she could not accomplish her purpose, and being the hostess of the evening, found it necessary soon to excuse herself and look after the pleasure of other guests. On her way to the house she passed by where Elsie was seated with Harry discussing the subject of Roy. Harry was in a rage, and Elsie was trying to quiet him. A few moments before Roy and young Bixby met Olive and her friends he had met Harry and Elsie, and Roy extending his hand to give them a cordial greeting was surprised to receive a rebuff from Harry. With much firmness and dignity he refused his proffered hand, and in addition said to him in plain words:

"Let it be understood, Mr. Wallis, that henceforth we are strangers. I am in possession of facts that have startled me greatly, and if I served you right, I would give you a good sound thrashing; but to avoid a scandal, I refrain from doing it. Let me say right here, if you ever speak to Miss Oaks or write her another letter I promise you will regret it. Your foul treachery to me shocked me beyond what language can express. I bid you good-evening, sir." Taking Elsie's arm they wheeled about and went in an opposite direction.

Roy was so taken by surprise that he made no reply. Not one word, but hung his head in shame as Harry addressed him. Turning around he walked across the lawn where Charley Bixby was standing smoking a cigar. They had a few moments' conversation, when

Roy took a roll of money from his pocket and handed to Bixby a bill. He, glancing at it quickly, looking around suspiciously to see that they were not discovered, put the money in his pocket, and the two walked on until they met Olive and her friends.

Olive on her way to the house tarried long enough with Elsie to learn the facts of the case. Of course she professed great sorrow over the affair in her usual smooth way. Harry did not put much confidence in her expression of sympathy, yet made no mention of his thoughts to Elsie.

When Olive reached the house she joined a party of friends who were seated on the piazza. She had been there but a few moments when she felt some one touch her arm. Looking around she saw her husband standing near her, who then leaned over and whispered to her that Mr. Wallis would like to speak with her in the parlor just a moment, Guy not knowing what had taken place out on the lawn.

Olive excused herself from her friends and went to meet Roy. To her surprise she found him in one corner of the parlor seated upon a sofa with his face buried in his hands. The room at the time was entirely vacated, all the guests being outside either on the piazza or around the grounds. She walked with such a light step that she was almost beside him before he discovered her presence. He arose immediately, and apologized for troubling her.

"Oh! no trouble at all, Mr. Wallis, I assure you."

As she glanced into his face she saw that he was un-

der great mental strain. Of course, knowing the nature of his thoughts, she was prepared to talk with him without any embarrassment or excitement whatever, while if she had been ignorant of the fact she might have been somewhat nervous under the circumstances.

"I asked for you, Mrs. Hills, to say good-by. I am going to Winchester. I have ordered my horse and carriage to be ready in ten minutes."

"Why, what is the trouble, I pray you, Mr. Wallis?"

"May I confide in you, Mrs. Hills?" said he. "Can I trust you?" glancing quickly around in every direction to see that there were no witnesses to the scene.

"Certainly you can, but don't keep me in suspense; tell me your trouble."

"I beg you, Mrs. Hills, don't repeat a word I say to you now. I am in love, desperately in love with Elsie, but she does not return my love. From the first moment I saw her I was determined to win her if possible, but all my efforts have been in vain. She evidently has informed Harry of my feelings toward her, and he used many very insulting remarks to me a few moments ago on the lawn, in presence of Elsie, and threatened me. I shall get even with him for his insolence. Do you think I may have any hope whatever of winning her love and affection?"

"Why, Mr. Wallis, I am surprised! I thought you were aware Harry and Elsie were engaged, and had been for nearly a year?"

"I understood all that, Mrs. Hills, yet the fact did not keep me from trying to gain her nevertheless."

"I am very sorry for you; only wish I could help you. I can offer you no encouragement. Elsie is very positive in her opinions and ideas, and when once her mind is made up, it is not easily changed. Of course, you know under what circumstances they became engaged; how she nursed him through the recovery from the accident with which he met, wherein we both might have lost our lives; certainly they formed a great attachment for each other, are surely deeply in love."

"I realize all you say, Mrs. Hills, and it makes me impatient to listen to what has been good luck to him."

He arose to go, extending his hand to say good-by. "I leave my regrets for your husband, I do not care to say a word to any one. I want to get away as soon as possible. Bixby will accompany me to town, for I don't know that I can find my way back even though the moon shines so brightly."

Roy passed out of the hall leading to the rear of the house, and was soon on his way to Winchester.

Young Bixby listened intently to plans Roy was mapping out to take revenge upon Harry for thwarting him in his attempt to win Elsie away from him. He found in Charley Bixby a very willing subject; he was such an easy mortal, influenced by the fascinating manner of Roy; that there was no difficulty in bending his will to that of his own, with the promise of good pay, and the little ready money which he had already given him, he fell into the temptation and promised to do his bidding forthwith.

After much persuasion Elsie succeeded in quieting

Harry, and gaining from him a promise not to cause any scene there among the guests. However, he was very much excited over the affair, even more than herself. She was so rejoiced over the promptness with which Harry met Roy's deceitful salutation that she forgot her nervousness and secretly laughed at the terrible shock which Harry's words gave to him. She had had much fear as to how Harry would meet him, and really dreaded the moment, but when it came so unexpectedly it was all over before she had time to fully realize it.

The party, outside of the unpleasant episode heretofore described, was a success. Everybody seemed to enjoy themselves wonderfully. The Rugers practically managed the whole affair. They moved around with an air of great importance; some people seem to feel the honor of a little authority greatly, it seems to lift them up far above the ordinary.

Alice was first in one part of the grounds, then another, looking after her duties. She always managed to get a sight of Van going about, much to his annoyance and dissatisfaction. He did not mind meeting her in his business place; there no comments would be made, but he certainly did at a fashionable party. It was entirely out of place for her to act so overpleasant to him there. So he moved out of sight. In a nook on the grounds to the left was a little summerhouse, which, fortunately, was unoccupied. It was perhaps a hundred feet away from the house, and about an equal distance from where the crowd was assembled on the lawn.

While Van was watching an opportunity to get by himself and away from Alice, there was another watching a chance to find him alone. He was seen to go to the summerhouse, and slyly he was followed thither. No sooner had he seated himself and lit a cigar than he saw some one coming whose form in the bright moonlight he recognized at once. He arose suddenly and moved toward the door: "Olive, what are you doing here? We must not be seen," said he.

"Hush, Van. I have been waiting to see you alone all the evening. Don't deprive me of this privilege. I have something to say to you which is on my heart and mind, and has been so long."

Van tried hard to convince her it was anything but right for them to be alone there on that or any other occasion, but the pleadings of Olive for him to listen to her overcame his determination of right or wrong, and finally he yielded to her request.

"Van, I am not happy, my heart aches for freedom again," said Olive. "If I had only listened to you before my marriage with Guy I would now be happy."

"You must not allow your mind, Olive, to dwell in this strain. I have told you before you are making yourself all the more miserable by doing so. You must be conscious of the fact that there is no law to free you from these bonds, no law but death or public disgrace, and therefore, I pray you to cease giving way to such thoughts, for they may lead us both into serious trouble, and far greater unhappiness."

"I realize all this, Van, but I must find relief for my

breaking heart. I have not the love for Guy I should have, and he does not possess for me the fascination that one of my nature requires. I come to you with the hope that you may help me to end this wretchedness, for I am determined not to continue any longer with this awful feeling in my breast, this feeling of unrest. Oh! God, that I were dead."

"Oh! Olive, do not be rash. Surely I cannot advise you against your own husband. That would be more than cruel and wicked, besides placing myself in a position which I do not want to be in. While I must admit my feelings for you are all a man could have for the woman he loves, yet I must not be a party to destroy the happiness that a husband may now have in his wife, even if that wife cannot respond to his feelings."

"I do not see how I shall endure this much longer. I am so unhappy. Oh, Van, I love you."

Van sprang to his feet with surprise at her remarks.

"Olive, how dare you speak thus, and especially here? You don't know who might be near and hear you. I pray you, calm yourself. You must return to the house at once; some one will notice your absence, and perhaps seek your whereabouts."

Hardly had Van finished speaking when he saw a man walking slowly around the corner of the summer-house; apparently he came from behind it—if so, had been a listener to all that was said. He then whispered softly to Olive that they were discovered. She arose from her seat and stepped forward to get a good look at the intruder. As he wended his way toward the house

with a sort of measured tread, she recognized in him at once her husband. "My God, it is Guy!" She staggered back to her seat and would have fallen had not Van caught her in his arms. He placed her gently in the old rustic seat where she had been sitting.

The fact of Guy being a listener to their conversation was a shock too great for her. Van was greatly agitated, too, over the predicament which he found himself placed in. Unwillingly he allowed Olive to remain in the summerhouse, and much to his annoyance, they had been discovered, and just how to place the matter right with Guy puzzled him greatly.

As soon as Olive recovered from her fright she made haste to return to the house and the lawn for fear her absence might cause comment. Her heart beat strangely fast as she approached the crowd, expecting to meet her husband at every turn. The night-time favored her greatly, for no one could discover any trace of her fright by her looks. The moon and the artificial lights cast the same glare over the face of every one present, regardless of their feelings.

She met her husband shortly afterward in the center of a group of people, engaged in conversation. He apparently was not disturbed in the least by what he saw and overheard, at least Olive could not discover any uneasiness in his manner. The cool way in which he took the whole affair seemed to puzzle her, even to annoy her. True, she was not positive it was her husband who saw her in the summerhouse, yet the form and the walk resembled those of her husband very closely,

and her knowledge of the fact that her action was wrong made her feel guilty.

When Van met him afterward he seemed just as pleasant as usual, and showed to him no outward sign of discomfort, or that he was conscious of being wronged by him in having any alliance with his wife.

Guy, though of easy disposition, knew when to act a cool and deliberate part. He knew it was useless to make a scene there before the whole company and destroy the pleasure of the guests; it would cause a great commotion, and the party would end in discord, as their friends were all in the height of enjoyment. He would wait and demand an explanation when Olive and he were alone.

It was late when the affair was over; every one there seemingly had had a good time. Those who were disappointed only knew it themselves—no one else—each kept their thoughts within their own breast, thereby fortunately causing no scene or angry words for the public to hear and make gossip of. The Rugers had their unhappiness in a measure. They did not seem to be successful as they had hoped with Van, for he somehow seemed to occupy his time with others of the party rather than with Alice.

Roy, too, met with a severe check in his forced love affair with Elsie. He went away unhappy, and with much regret. Van's heart was heavy over his unfortunate predicament. He felt he owed an apology to Guy. It troubled him because he did not seek the meeting with Olive. It really was her fault, and still he was

too much of a man to inform her husband how it came about. He would rather bear the blame himself in order to shield her.

Olive, too, carried a load upon her heart and mind. She was guilty; she could not escape that fact. It seemed for once to prey upon her mind. Though she had always practiced deceit, it now had somewhat of a different effect upon her. Guy, though generally considered a slow fellow among his associates, acted with good judgment this time. He made up his mind to be calm with her, and use no words of violence in the conversation he intended to have when he and Olive were alone. Yet in his heart there was deep grief at the falsity of Olive's nature; but he was her husband, and loved her dearly, and while he believed she had done nothing criminal, still he felt hurt over the injustice of the affair, and to him the party had been a failure.

Elsie and Harry, the Sargents and Pendletons all enjoyed themselves as well as the hosts who were there, and were it not for the few unpleasant incidents which occurred it would surely have been one round of pleasure.

It was long past midnight when Guy and Olive were alone in their apartments. She sat upon a low divan with her head resting against the wainscoting of the room, her eyes were closed, and her face wore an expression of coldness and sternness. Guy approached her, gently laying one hand upon her shoulder, bent over and almost whispered, his voice was soft and low, the rapid beating of his heart, the excitement of the

occasion and circumstances caused a choking sensation in his throat, and really after the first few words it was a difficult matter for him to speak at all.

"Olive," said he, "we have been married now nearly eight months. In that time I have never spoken a cross word to you, or found any fault in you—of myself—but busybodies have come to me with reports from time to time about you—how you were playing me false, clandestinely meeting one and another in the village, particularly Mr. Chadwick. I never gave the matter much thought, for I considered the source from which they came. I really did not believe them, but to-night, after what I saw and heard, I am convinced it is true. I had occasion to go over to the stable in the rear of our grounds and came back by the short way, passing the summerhouse. Hearing Van's voice pleading apparently with you to go from the place, and then your voice, I gave a start first, then—God forgive me—I listened, and overheard all you said to him. I can never express to you my feelings, but I am glad to know what I do, yet my heart aches, oh, so bitterly, in the knowledge of this truth. I cannot lay any blame upon Mr. Chadwick for from what I could learn you followed him there—away from our own guests, when you should have been entertaining them—you went to find one you love better than me; you said so in plain words to him there. May God forgive you, Olive, as I do! I give you your choice of returning to your father's house, if you so wish. I will not stand in your way. Oh, I am so unhappy!"

With these words he sank down upon the divan where Olive was seated, and listening to his burning words of truth which brought the shame to her face, and caused a flush the like of which he had never seen before to go over it. He buried his face in his hands and wept aloud.

Poor Olive. Guy's manner had been so gentle it overcame her. She too burst into tears and cried as if her heart would break. Throwing her arms around his neck she kissed him again and again. This display of unexpected affection on her part seemed to have the desired effect. He raised his head and brushed away the tears that were raining down Olive's face, and tried to quiet her by speaking gently to her, and with much affection.

"I did very, very wrong, Guy, but am so sorry. I surely did not realize what injustice I was doing you. Forgive me, my darling, forgive me."

Then she burst into another flood of tears, which was too much for Guy. He took her into his arms and kissed away her apparent sorrow. For a long time neither of them spoke, when Olive broke the silence by saying: "Guy, shall I go back to Twin Oaks now to live?"

She had recovered her composure to a certain extent, and there was a saucy smile upon her lips. Guy, having forgiven her indiscretion, made haste to reply to her question:

"No! No! No! my darling, stay! I forgive you, and will trust you from this hour."

Olive was happy now because she had accomplished her purpose in winning back his confidence and forgiveness at the same time, and covering the disgrace which might have followed had her unfaithfulness been made public. She succeeded, too, in gaining from him a promise not to speak to Van about the affair. Guy, too, was happy; he believed her repentance sincere, and that she would be faithful to him, faithful as a true wife should be. But alas! though his wife she was still a flirt.

CHAPTER X.

THE HOUSE WARMING.

THE new house Van had been building was about completed; there remained but few finishing touches to make it ready for its furnishings. It was a very modern structure, arranged with all the conveniences of the day, built upon an elevation overlooking the town, which gave it much prominence. During the course of its building not a word did Van say to any one as to who was to reside there when ready for occupancy, though his plans were all laid. The gossipers of the village had wagged their tongues so freely over his attentions to Olive prior to her marriage, he had made up his mind to keep his own counsel pertaining to the matter of his new home. They might speculate, but they would not know, until he saw fit to make it public.

No doubt his uncle Sargent knew of his intentions, but if so, he never spoke of it. Possibly Van had cautioned him not to give out any information.

Not having been brought up in the country, he was not familiar with their ways. The customs of the country are virtually in direct opposition to those of the city. In the city it makes no difference what your neighbor does, no questions are asked, everybody seems

to enjoy giving strict attention to their own peculiar business, while in the country it is the duty of every individual to learn as much of their neighbors' affairs as possible—the more they find out the more they would have to gossip about and criticise.

Van had now been a resident of Winchester some months. In that time he had become acquainted with a host of country people in and about the village. His acquaintance extended even to the little scrub-oak town of "Log Hollow," the home of the Rugers, far beyond the white schoolhouse district on the north, and meeting house square on the south.

As his residence was completed, the next thing was to furnish it, so within a few days after the party at Olive's, he set about to complete the task. It called forth all his best skill, forethought, and judgment, to enable him to select modern styles of furniture and articles of art. He was very independent in his nature, and resolved to do this work himself, that he might have no one to criticise, if afterward he was not suited.

After making due preparations he left Winchester for the city, looking about for many house ornaments and articles of bric-a-brac, pictures, and plate, giving much care and deliberation in his purchases. He prided himself in doing whatever he had to do with much thought and exercising great judgment, as well as taste. His coming to Winchester, as far as a business venture was concerned, was very successful, though his love affair had not been; that was a failure, even before he took up his permanent abode there. He intended

that his new home and its furnishings should add more glory to his fame, as a successful man, in domestic affairs, as well as business enterprise. He hoped to give the people of his town an opportunity to judge of his knowledge of planning and making a home, for when his house was all finished and in order, he was going to have a party and invite all his friends and acquaintances. It being summer time they could use the lawn as well as the house within, and see what efforts he had put forth to beautify his home, and add one more attractive and substantial residence to Winchester.

For the next two or three weeks large packing cases, boxes, and barrels came to Winchester, filled with all manner of furnishings for his new house. Great excitement was caused by this fact among the villagers, for their curiosity knew no bounds. They wanted to get a peep at his new furniture. Those whom he employed to set these beautiful pieces in their places were cautioned by Van not to make public how valuable or exquisite this or that was. He was wise enough to bring parties from the city to help in arranging the things, thereby keeping the gossips from telling what they knew, and also keeping them guessing on what they did not know.

His general plan from the beginning to the end was a happy success, and when he was ready he issued invitations to more than three hundred of the villagers and those of the vicinity, to attend his lawn party, or as they call it in the country, housewarming—a phrase that would, perhaps, apply better in the winter season than in midsummer. He hoped it would eclipse in

every way the one given a few weeks before at Olive's. He had reason to believe it would, because everything inside and out was new, yet there could not possibly be found any fault with Olive's party; only this one given by an unmarried man on the opening, too, of his new house so beautifully furnished throughout, would seem to make the occasion more romantic.

The people had speculated so much as to how his house would be furnished, the size of it, the number of rooms and general plans, that they were anxious to attend his party. They had heard it rumored, too, that the young lady whom he was going to marry from the city would be present, and, of course, all were delighted at an opportunity to meet her. No one as yet had ever seen her, but the knowing ones of the community had heard all about her. Where the rumor originated no one knew, yet it must be so. Some one had pictured her as a dark-eyed beauty like Olive, for they imagined that such a type would be his choice, and, of course, as he did not succeed in winning her, why it was surely reasonable that he would select some one who closely resembled her, if such should exist.

Van had lived somewhat the life of a recluse, particularly as far as concerned entering into the society of women around Winchester, though he had called frequently at Twin Oaks, was very friendly with Elsie, and even more so with her charming cousin, Florence Wood. But in no way was he a society man, even as far as that goes in a country town; only just pleasant and agreeable to those he met.

In his large list of invitations he included all the young people of the village, the young married people, as well as the older ones who would be likely to come; in fact, he invited every one who, he thought, would be eligible for such an occassion.

The day of the party was one of extreme heat, the temperature ran high, away beyond the nineties. On that evening, or early afternoon in July, as the people gathered upon the lawn, every one at once was fascinated with the beautiful location of his home, with its many charming attractions, prettier by far than Olive's home, and many said even more so than Twin Oaks, though, of course, not so extensive by any means. But there was a certain freshness about everything, all so newly built, with such exquisite taste and judgment, so clean, and everywhere bearing the appearance of refinement. Though the heat of the day had been intense, yet late in the afternoon when the sun began to lose its power, as it sank behind the hills in the west, the breeze commenced to blow, and as the house was situated on quite a high plane, the grounds soon became comfortable and agreeable to the guests.

Among the first to arrive were Guy and Olive, this being their first visit to the place. Olive was delighted, and as she walked around the grounds with her husband and Van there was a peculiar expression on her face as the thoughts one after another came into her mind. Though apparently happy, by her outward expression, yet unhappy within—such a lovely home—how she might have been the one to occupy it. Oh, if she had

only accepted Van. She saw now how foolish she had been, that is, she termed it thus. Her heart beat wildly against her breast as thoughts passed quickly through her mind. Though walking beside Guy she did not realize his presence, nor scarcely that of Van. Every fiber of her being was awake and conscious of the fact that she had let an opportunity go by which now at this late day could not be recalled, an opportunity never to be enjoyed again unless something would happen—and she shuddered at her thoughts, something which would give her freedom.

When the Oaks family arrived they came without Harry, much to the surprise of Van. Poor Elsie wore a sorrowful expression, while her face was very pale. When Van met Elsie he expressed his great surprise and disappointment in not seeing Harry.

"Why, Van, I can tell you why he is not here, and I would not have been here myself only for papa and mamma, who made me come, particularly to please Florence. Harry wrote me in both of his letters this week that he would be up to the party in case he received an invitation."

"What, Elsie, in case he received an invitation? I mailed him one myself the same time I sent the rest, and furthermore, I wrote him a letter which accompanied it, asking him whether I should invite his friend Wallis up or not."

"Did you get a reply to the letter, Mr. Chadwick?"

"No, I did not, and I thought it strange, too, but I have been so very busy with everything that it had

quite slipped my mind. 'Tis singular enough, indeed, for I know I mailed him an invitation. I am exceedingly sorry, particularly on your account."

"I am, too, Van, I assure you. I could have told you a few days ago, yet I thought of course if you had not sent it, that you surely would in time. I am awfully disappointed; too bad it went astray."

Just then Florence and Mrs. Oaks came along, and the explanation was made to them, much to their regret also.

It could be plainly seen something was troubling Elsie, though she tried to be happy and gay, among such a large crowd of acquaintances and neighbors. So many questions were asked her about the absence of Harry, when his name was spoken it almost choked her to reply, and often her eyes filled with tears when she thought how provoking it was that he failed to receive an invitation.

"Of course you did not invite Mr. Wallis then, did you?" said Elsie.

"No, I did not from my own choice. I never fancied him, but the fact is, I knew he was a friend of Harry's, so, of course, wrote him to know if he wished him invited."

"Why, Van, he is no friend of Harry's. Haven't you heard they had a falling out at Olive's party, and over me, too?"

"Why, I am surprised, Elsie; tell me about it."

Then Elsie briefly told him how the quarrel came about, and all the facts which led up to it—greatly to

his surprise, for, said he, "Wallis gave me to understand he had been quite a friend of his, long before either of them ever visited Winchester."

After the conversation with Van, Elsie's mind was somewhat relieved, yet she went about sorrowing, for, after all, Harry was not there.

Mr. and Mrs. Sargent were sitting in a group, among which were the Hills and Elsie's father and mother, and a number of their most intimate friends.

"Well, Uncle Sargent," said Van, "how does the new house and its surroundings please you?"

"Very much, very much, my boy, if you don't get too worldly by having such a beautiful home and forget your Lord. You know what the good book says, Psalms lxxxiv., x.: 'I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than to dwell in the tents of wickedness.' "

"Yes, I know, uncle, but Mr. Oaks has a very beautiful home, and he has not grown worldly."

"True, true, my boy; quite to the contrary. Mr. Oaks is a good man, and the Psalms xcii., verse xii., says: 'The righteous shall flourish like a palm tree, he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon.' "

"Ha! ha! ha! Mr. Sargent, you flatter me wonderfully," said Mr. Oaks. "Yet I appreciate your good opinion of me, I assure you. I have tried to make a good record for myself as well as to do my duty."

"You certainly have accomplished it," said Van.

"Yes, 'tis true," replied Mr. Sargent, "Mr. Oaks has been a good neighbor,"

Long after the sun had gone down behind the cedar-covered hills which lay to the west of Winchester that evening, a large crowd had assembled upon the lawn of Van's home, and a happier lot of people with one or two exceptions never were together. Olive was unhappy as well as Elsie. Olive because of a restless, wicked heart and uneasy disposition, and a longing for that which she could not possibly possess. She loved Van, and now already had fallen in love with his beautiful new home. Elsie was unhappy—Harry was not there, and that was just and sufficient reason for her, and the only one; otherwise she was her usual self, always gay and sweet, yet modest; one of those lovely characters we seldom meet in life, while she was so very agreeable and sociable to all, yet always true.

Olive during the afternoon and early evening had watched for an opportunity to speak privately with Van, and after a long wait she saw her chance and succeeded in meeting him alone as he was crossing the lawn.

"Oh! Van, I want to speak to you."

"Yes, Olive, what will it be? I am at your service." Whether he wanted to talk with her privately or not, he could not do otherwise than acquiesce under the circumstances.

Two or three times since my party I have been in your store, but failed to get the opportunity to say a word quietly to you; always some one was there, and I preferred not to attract any attention, as a whispered conversation might do in such a public place, so have

been obliged to wait. *I* want to know whether Guy has spoken to you about our little affair in the summer-house, when he overheard our conversation?"

"No, Olive, not one word. I have been expecting him to do so ever since, but of course I was prepared to shield you and still satisfy his supposed injury."

"Just like you, Van, not to lay the blame where it belongs. To shield me; you would have taken it on yourself; it was not your fault, wholly mine. I am willing to take all the punishment. Ha! ha! but you will never hear of it, I guess, because he promised me that evening never to speak to you about it."

"What did he say, Olive, to you?"

Then she related all that occurred that evening after her household had become quiet, and they were in their own apartments. Van was surprised, too, that it really was Guy; had begun to think Olive was mistaken, and it had been some one of the guests strolling about the grounds who had taken that path which led by the summerhouse back to the lawn as a short cut. He was pleased to know that apparently all was ended so easily without bringing him into any open difficulty with Guy.

"Oh, Van, I do so admire your lovely home." As Olive spoke these words she gazed full into his eyes, and even in the glare of the light her face was suffused with pretty blushes, and a radiant expression overshadowed it, which fairly reflected into Van's countenance, forcing the blood to course swiftly through his veins. He loved Olive; he could not help showing his

feelings for her; she seemed to fascinate him again and again; sometimes he almost lost control of his better judgment and threatened to carry out that which the pressure upon his mind suggested, regardless of the consequences. It would have suited Olive had he done so; he had used all his fascinating forces prior to her marriage for her to give up Guy; but she was persistent in carrying out her marriage contract. He warned her she would regret it, and she had, a thousand times. The words which he whispered to her just after the wedding rang in her ears constantly, and imprinted themselves upon her mind in bold type, and now, when she would have broken these solemn vows and run away with him, if he had only suggested it, he was persistent not to do evil; the good in his heart seemed yet to prevail over the evil, though her beautiful eyes, her sweet, winsome graces, and charming ways were slowly breaking the chains which bound him to the right.

"I am very happy, Olive, to hear you say that. I have used every effort, and spared no pains or expense to make my home attractive, and now I lack only one thing to complete it;" and then moving close to her, with his heart almost on fire with love, he whispered to her on that beautiful summer's night: "And that happiness can never be mine."

During their conversation they had been walking around the grounds, and as Van uttered these last words they were nearing the house, and the crowd was on the lawn hard by. Olive was about to reply, but *some one* rushed up and commenced conversing with

them, so she had no opportunity. Her heart beat so strangely, she was all in a flutter of excitement. Fortunately it was night-time, or her face would have told a story which she would not have cared to make public.

Van was compelled to excuse himself, as others were calling for him, so he left Olive while his last words were still burning in her mind. "I only lack one thing to make my home complete, and that happiness can never be mine."

There never was a gathering of people yet but that some unhappy creature was there among them. It is always so; we have them in church and state, in politics and religion, in social and family circles; everywhere sin abounds, discontent and evil are in the world. We have to contend with them morning, noon, and night. We meet the unhappy victims who are longing for that which they cannot have, and have that which they do not want.

Oh, world of sin and unhappiness, in thee we have to dwell
Until called away to eternal rest, either to Heaven or Hell.

CHAPTER XI.

TREACHERY.

SHORTLY after Olive's party at Winchester—there happened a sad occurrence over in Boston in the Wallis household. Death suddenly entered and claimed another victim. Roy's father one day was seized with an attack of vertigo while in his private office in the bank and died without regaining consciousness, before help could reach him.

There was a brief history connected with this man Wallis, dating back to his early manhood, almost to his youth.

Sidney Wallis, the father of Roy, was a money-maker; if he could not gain it legitimately, then he would use the next best method to obtain it. He had no conscience about how he came into possession of money as long as he got it.

When a young man, it is said he went on a voyage with two other young men to a foreign country to engage in business. The other young men had quite a large amount of money with them. Wallis went along as a helper, also as a companion, and to share in whatever profits might arise out of the venture.

They crossed the sea safely, for a letter was received

from each of them by their parents, the lines of which were crowded with high hopes for the future, they had such positive assurance of success from their very start, although they went away against the wishes of all their friends and relatives.

It was springtime when they went away, and two or three letters had come from them to their home here, when suddenly, without the slightest bit of warning or ceremony, in walked young Sidney Wallis. His father and mother were at dinner his home-coming was a great surprise; he came alone. His comrades, he said had been captured; they were run down by a pirate vessel, had been murdered for all he knew, and he had escaped. The story at first was believed, and always was until the day of his death by some of the townspeople. Others differed in their views of the case; what caused a doubt in their minds was how he came into possession of so much money, for immediately upon his return he engaged in business on his own account with apparently plenty of capital at his command. His father was not a man of any great means either.

All through his life he was shrewd in business and prosperity seemed to attend every enterprise he engaged in. He had many large interests in the city of Boston, whither he went a year or two after his return and where he lived at the time of his death.

Roy Wallis was a partner with him and occupied a lucrative position in the bank, where he gave close attention to his work, particularly up to the commencement of this story.

Mrs. Wallis died some years previous, leaving but the one child, Roy, so on the death of his father he came immediately into possession of a large amount of wealth. After paying several legacies which were in the will there was at least half a million dollars left for Roy.

The mysterious disappearance of the companions of Sidney Wallis, so many years before, was a past history. The generation who knew Roy were unacquainted with the facts. There were two bequests in the will that proved the theory which some of the old residents of his birthplace always had maintained, that he knew more about the death of his companions than he cared to state; that through his treachery in some way his comrades were sacrificed, possibly so that he might come into possession of their money—return home then with it as his own and tell an exciting story of escape; but the true facts would never become public property.

The two young men in question were cousins named Wells, farmers' sons, who lived but a mile or two from town and had been early playmates of each other, and attended the same school and church. They each had a sister, who, after a time, married and lived near their old homes, and it was to these two people he left a legacy of twenty five thousand dollars each. The clause in the will simply read "I devise and bequeath to Mrs. John Sanderson and Mrs. Arthur Winslow, each, the sum of twenty-five thousand dollars to be theirs to hold, own, and possess, or for their heirs forever; this gift to them is made in memory of their

brothers who were captured and put to death by pirates in a foreign sea."

There was no other explanation—all through his life he had been uncharitable and cold, penurious and extremely close in his dealings with men, so death found him in the midst of his business engagements, and without a doubt unprepared to meet his judgment. To ease his conscience somewhat he left these bequests, though there was no good feeling which prompted him to do this—he was through with his wealth, he could not take it with him—so to partly undo the wrong which, no doubt he was identified with in some way, he gave it fortunately where it belonged, and where it was a blessing; for these people were in declining years, and possessed limited means.

His ill-gotten gain prospered in his hands, but after it was given to his heir it brought with it a judgment that should have fallen on the father.

Roy Wallis was desperately in love with Elsie. He had loved other women; but this time he was sincere in his love. After his experience at the lawn party he began to lay plans either to gain Elsie's hand, although he had no hope of accomplishing it, or else to break off the engagement between Harry and her; it was a heartless game he intended to play.

On the way to Winchester that night in returning from the party, Roy unfolded part of his plan to young Bixby. He told him just how much he loved Elsie, what the result was at the present time, and how insulting Harry's remarks had been to him. Turni-

partly around to him in the carriage he said: "Charley, I have plenty of money and I will pay you handsomely, if you will act as my private agent here; I want some good, trustworthy chap." As he said this he slapped him on the back. "You are just the fellow for me, I can pay you more for one hour's work for me, than you can earn in your father's post office in Winchester in a whole year; but you must keep this a secret and do just as I want you to do. Will you do it?"

"Yes, Mr. Wallis, I will do anything for money My father often tells me I'll never be able to earn my own living, but now I'll show him, I guess."

"True, Charley, but he must not know I am paying you, for outwardly you're rendering me no service and he would surmise something wrong. Surely you can put your money in the savings bank at Annandale and he will not know anything about it."

"All right, Mr. Wallis, I can do that."

Bixby was so anxious to make some extra money, that he was perfectly willing to fall into any scheme that Wallis would propose. With this understanding Roy took from his pocket a roll of money and handed him fifty dollars to bind their infamous bargain. He had already given him ten dollars the same evening on the lawn. This generosity on the part of Roy completely captivated young Bixby and after he had placed the money in his pocket, he was ready to listen to any proposition that Roy had in mind.

By the time they reached Winchester, they thoroughly understood each other. Roy swore him to

secrecy and by accepting the money he had made himself the tool of Wallis, which would help them both on to perdition as fast as possible.

The next morning Roy called on Bixby at the office, and when he found an opportunity, he had a private chat with him and as he left, he said: "I am going to Boston this afternoon and will be back again in a few days. I have a scheme which we will carry out and I hope the result will teach Mr. Pendleton that his impudence to me cannot go unpunished."

Young Bixby when left to himself to meditate upon the contemptible wickedness and deceit he had entered into was almost penitent and resolved to send back the money which he had accepted, and refuse to carry out his part in playing false to his friends. Had it not been for remarks which his father again made to him that day, he would have doubtless yielded to his better judgment and written Roy he could not conscientiously work for him, in any capacity whatever, and therewith returned him his money.

Charley's father was a hard-working man, yet never had been successful in business affairs. He had a number of children who unfortunately had brought him much trouble, sickness, and expense, and always kept him poor, and until he was appointed postmaster at Winchester, he had had rather a difficult time to meet all his many wants or necessities.

Charley was a young man who possessed but little natural common sense, was lazy and lacked good judgment in many things. His father often became dis-

couraged with him and when he was compelled to scold him said harsh and cutting things. On this occasion his father chided him bitterly and called him hard names, and immediately the young man's heart hardened and he resolved to do anything that Roy proposed, whether it was wrong or right. He felt discouraged and the language of his father grated harshly on his ears and seemed to help along the work which Satan had already begun in his heart; so he decided not to write to Roy, but to keep the money and get as much more as possible out of the work he had for him to do.

A few days after Roy reached home, his father was stricken down and after the funeral was over he was compelled to look after important business matters which kept him away from Winchester longer than he at first intended. When suddenly one day he appeared there, his first call after he registered at the hotel was on Charley to learn if he had any news for him. When Roy found out about the intended lawn party of Chadwick's which was to take place in a very short time, he then said to Bixby:

"If he sends a letter or invitation to Harry Pendleton you take it out of the office and inclose it in another envelope and mail it to me. As you handle all the mail you will be careful to see if Van mails any to him. Please follow my instructions in full and for such a letter I will give you fifty dollars."

Bixby promised faithfully to keep a close watch of the mails the next few days; the money so liberally offered had a great charm for him and he could see no

particular harm in simply taking a letter which he knew only contained an invitation to a lawn party, and it never would be found out anyhow, thought he.

Roy did not see Van on this visit nor did he go near Twin Oaks. Van was in the city buying goods for his store as well as fixings for his new house. At any rate he did not care to meet him again as he had entered into a combine with Bixby to steal his letter, so felt rather conscience-smitten, for Van had never done him any harm. He knew this would keep Harry away from the party, disappoint Elsie, and he would be revenged partly for the insult which Harry had heaped upon him a few weeks before.

While Roy loved Elsie, he began to hate her for not yielding to his protestations of love, or even condescending to reply to any of the letters which he had written her. Of course this hate of his was purely nominal toward Elsie; it was only the reflection of a moment's anger just giving vent to a little spite. He would have done anything for her if it was toward gaining her permission to address her, or visit her, but as she gave him no encouragement whatever from the first he was now ready to show the evil disposition which his heart possessed.

The next day he returned to Boston to await results. He had the hope now of gaining a little satisfaction out of his efforts and some interest back on his investment. He watched the mail with great anxiety and in a few days was rewarded for his waiting; a letter came from Bixby; inside of the envelope was one from Van

to Harry; there was also a letter to Harry asking if he should invite his friend Wallis to the party. When he read that it brought the color to his face: shame overspread it; he felt his wretched deceit more clearly than ever; yet there was a wicked glee in his heart over the fact that Harry, of course, would expect an invitation and Elsie would also expect him at the party and both would be disappointed; that fact filled him with a sort of delight. He immediately replied to Bixby, inclosed fifty dollars, and told him to watch the mail, as Van might write again on not receiving any answer to his first letter. The evening of the party Bixby was on hand, not for his own personal enjoyment alone, but to watch proceedings and report to Roy. He kept his eyes on the Oaks family and followed them around as much as he dared without creating suspicion of any kind. He engaged Elsie in conversation several times during the evening, hoping she would commit herself in some way, so that he might write to Roy what she said. While he was not the brightest of fellows by any means he knew enough to play the part of detective when money would be the result of his efforts.

Of course he learned from Elsie what he already knew that Harry had not received an invitation. He changed the subject quickly, for the topic made him feel his littleness. The thought of using her in such a manner (for really she was the injured one), made him nervous and he acted strangely. His guilty conscience played havoc with his generally easy manner, and he felt as if the whole world knew his secret, although

poor little Elsie was not aware of it. She chatted on with him as long as he would stay; all the while his miserable conscience pricking him and making him extremely unhappy; a thousand times he wished already he had not stolen the letter.

Roy waited anxiously for the letter which would tell him about the party and what Elsie said, and how she stood the disappointment, and whether Van had any suspicion of his letter being stolen or not.

Of course, Van did not suspect such a thing; at any rate, the very last one in the world to suspect would have been Bixby; he seemed to Van the most innocent of country boys, for really he was only boy in years, less than twenty and young in looks; had been on very friendly terms with him since he lived in Winchester, and had known the Oaks family all his life. Hence even if he had any suspicion, it would have never been directed toward him.

Bixby wrote to Roy that their scheme had worked like a charm and that he was ready now to take hold of any work he had in that line. The evil spirit had entered into his heart and taken possession of it, and already the success of his first venture tempted him further. Though when in the presence of Elsie he became nervous, yet when alone and away in his own room writing to Roy, he grew bold and fearless and opened wide the thoughts of his heart and mind, and even gave suggestions to him; for apparently he was so anxious to do something more, he could not wait to hear from Roy. It only goes to prove that a wicked

person is a very impatient person. Heaven knows that Roy Wallis did not need an adviser in the way of wrongdoing.

Since the party at Olive's, Roy and Harry had not met in the city though they lived at no great distance from each other. They seemed to keep out of each other's way, whether purposely or not. Harry was in no frame of mind to meet him and preferred to let matters take their own course. If by chance they met, he was prepared to tell him in plain words what he thought of his foul treachery. The more he thought of it the more angry he grew. Roy felt ashamed somewhat of his conduct when he soberly thought of his open deceit toward his friend, and he made no effort to come in contact with him.

Van was highly pleased with his party. The way in which he had arranged the whole affair brought him much praise from his guests, it was a grand success indeed. Of course the little excitement of Olive's conversation neither added to nor took away from the interest of the affair.

As the guests departed and shook him by the hand, many of them remarked that the next time they visited his beautiful home he would have another to share with him the happiness of entertaining. Though his house was complete, yet it lacked the charming grace which a lovely wife gives to a home like his.

Van laughed at their remarks and in reply said: "I am in no hurry whatever to settle down in life; I have built this place though for a permanent residence.

Maybe some day I shall marry, but when, I know not, I have not given it a thought."

When the crowd had gone it was late, but Van had no thought of retiring; his mind was occupied with many thoughts which seemed when he was alone to weigh heavily upon him. He sat for a long time upon one of the piazzas, smoked and watched the stars in the heavens as they shone so brightly. He lived all over his first visit to Winchester, when he met Olive, but it brought him no comfort as he sat there brooding over his imaginary troubles. Her pretty face and eyes seemed to be gazing into his out of the darkness of the night. He could see her in the vision before him and hear her say: "This home ought to have been ours, Van." The words sounded so plainly and distinctly that he was startled for a moment, and he jumped to his feet; but the sound died away, no one was there, he was alone, alone with his sad heart, it was all imagination. But he said to himself: "Who can tell what a year may bring forth."

CHAPTER XII.

"POOR GUY."

REFLECTION after the party, as it came to Olive, only added to her unhappiness. On the way home she scarcely spoke to Guy—if so, only in monosyllables. Her mind was full of deep thoughts connecting the past with the future, comparing what was with what might have been, and with what the present binding associations were to her.

Guy saw that something was troubling Olive. He questioned her very carefully after he reached home, yet considerately, he had a presentiment that there existed a secret love affair between her and Van, because of the little happening which he accidentally became a witness to at their own party a few weeks before, and because of her silent, quiet way when they were alone of late. Her face lost its bright glow and a sternness overshadowed it, which made her cold as a piece of marble. He questioned her concerning this, but it did not avail him anything, for she denied absolutely having any such intrigue, and told him he was ridiculously silly to entertain such thoughts for a moment. Even though she emphasized these words pretty strongly, it did not have the usual effect upon him; he declared that she was playing him false. Such an accusation from

her husband made her grow red with rage. He never before in his life had so openly charged her with being a flirt, and she vowed there and then he should regret what he had said. Guy was calm and cool as was his general custom; her seeming rage did not fluster him, and because of his unconcern she grew the more desperate.

Their differences were a long way from being settled that night, and as they retired it was to lie with sleepless eyes each thinking over their unhappiness. Olive planning to free herself, and Guy wondering why he had not been more conscious of her disposition before he married her. But when he thought over his love for her, he forgot any little fault which she seemed to possess. Thus it was that he was led on and on, until it was too late to turn backward, for his love could be gratified in no other way than taking her unto himself as his wife. Now in less than a year she was cold and indifferent, even worse than that—actually hated him, for she had told him so, in just so many words, while he still loved her. His heart was awfully cut by her proceedings and was beginning to undergo a change somewhat, though he did not hate her, nor ever would, while life lasted.

He could not forget the happy childhood days so soon, wherein she was his brightest star, nor their schooldays so full of outdoor sports common to the young life in the country, nor their days of courtship where love seemed so to abound, nor their wedding; all these facts came into his mind with great positive-

ness and made him feel like pressing her fondly again to his breast as of old, and calling her by some sweet little pet name as so often he had done. No, he could not hate Olive; though she had changed toward him, yet his heart was still true to her. The morning broke fair and lovely; the summer sun was high in the heavens when Olive came down from her room, her eyes red with weeping and swollen from loss of sleep, and very much inflamed. Guy arose long before she did and went out to direct some workmen, who were engaged in making changes in one of his barns, so she had time to herself to quietly meditate upon the wicked thoughts that were in her heart; Satan had tempted her and she was trying already to find a plan to suit the temptation. The long hours of the morning she had spent with eyes wide open upon her bed looking up into darkness, and through it she saw many enchanting visions, at least, they were so to her. The face of Van floated above her in the vision, his words of a year before still rang into her ears: "You will regret it, Olive, if you marry Guy."

"Oh! how she did regret it, and why? Was not Guy a good man? yes; was he not all any woman could ask for, faithful and affectionate? Did he not grant her every wish and gratify her many whims? Yes, all. Then why did she regret her marriage? Why did she live as if he was a bore to her? Because Guy did not possess those characteristics in his nature that one of Olive's disposition seemed to demand. She was fond of gayety, he was quiet and reserved. She

liked outdoor sports, he was domestic. She liked the society of other men because she found in each new face something which seemed to animate her and make life pleasant and full of excitement, he preferred to be alone with her. She possessed a fascination for him which no other woman had; while this steady, unbroken affection on his part for her rather tired her, and thus she sought other associations to gratify her fickle heart. Thus each day the breach widened; her love gradually turned into hate, and after these hours of anger, it was desperate—she vowed the end must come and quickly, too, or she would go wild. Then Satan came to her relief; he often leads people on until they get where there is no turning back, then suddenly he leaves them to find their own way or grope about in the darkness and get out of difficulty as best they can. She did not stop to consider these truths, but held out her hand to take the one which was offered her by the evil spirit, and was led into paths which at first were emblazoned with light. A smile overspread her visage, when she thought of the happy result her efforts would surely bring to her—her heart already beat loudly against her breast in exultant joy over the prospects she saw just ahead; what had been apparently an impossibility could be easily reached now, and on and on she walked into green pastures, where the soft, velvety earth gave way gently under her weight and seemed to take so pretty an impression of her little foot. She pictured to herself, when all would be over, a contented life, full of peace, where joy that had been unknown

would be hers. "Oh, how can I wait, dear one; how can I wait for you? You have opened mine eyes to new scenes and my heart to new revelations."

When Guy returned to the house for his breakfast, Olive was already seated at the table in a very dignified manner, with a firm expression about her mouth. She did not say good-morning, nor even give him a faint smile, while he had almost forgotten the scene of a few hours before, in the work which he had been directing out at the barn, and only for the loss of sleep, he would have been as usual. He tried to appear pleasant, but the social side of Olive's nature was far from being in evidence just then. As he became conscious of the fact, he let her alone and they ate their morning meal in silence.

The thoughts which had occupied Olive's mind in the early dawn of the morning, remained with her all the day long. When evening came she had formed a definite plan, and now her aim was to carry it out as soon as possible. She had so far recovered from her passion and anger by that time that she was in quite a talkative mood which surely was a relief to Guy, for he could not carry any anger long in his heart, particularly toward Olive, he was happy when evening came to find her partially pleasant at least.

The next morning at their breakfast, Olive said to Guy: "I think I will take a little trip to the city, and while there run down to the seashore, too. I am feeling so blue these days it will do me lots of good. I will visit at Marshall's and be gone perhaps a week.

I am sorry, Guy, you cannot go now, but for the building you might; you would not like to leave the carpenters I suppose."

"No, Olive, I can't possibly go now. Why don't you wait until I have finished the barn?"

"How long will it take you?"

"Oh, about two weeks, I think."

"Oh, no, no, Guy, I want to go now. I received a letter from the Marshall's a few days ago, urging me to come at once before the season is over and if I wait two whole weeks I will be out of the notion of going at all."

"Very well, dear, as you like," said he, in his mild way.

So it was arranged that Olive would go to the city that evening, telegraphing her friends to meet her on arrival of the express from Winchester.

After the train had carried Olive away and Guy was on the way back home, he fell into a deep thought over her actions of late, while his team traveled slowly on.

"She does not seem happy with me; I am satisfied as to that; and furthermore, I know she loves Chadwick, and he loves her. But I am convinced he will never take advantage of me, because of the conversation I overheard that night in the summerhouse; he is an honorable fellow. I have tried to do my duty by her. It is only a year, or a little less now, since our wedding and already she is very unhappy. I cannot account for it; what I have done, I know not, to make her hate me; she has told me so time and time again. Oh,

Olive, Olive, if you only knew my heart; if you would but come back to me and be as you were a few years ago, yea even a year ago, I would be happy; but there is such a coldness in your nature, such an insurmountable barrier between our hearts, or rather in your heart, my darling—love has gone, hate has taken its place. I wish death would come and relieve me of my unhappiness, or that the dear Providence would guide you safely back to my heart again. I must have relief from this aching heart. I cannot live in this way. My heart yearns after your love, my darling—must it be in vain?"

Tears were streaming down the poor fellow's face, and great drops of perspiration were pouring off his brow. The heat of the summer evening, his broken heart, and disturbed peace of mind had brought him to his present condition, and by the time he reached his home he was in a deplorable state, both in body and mind. He lay down to rest and tried to sleep, but his thoughts were too active. He tossed all night upon his couch, lonesome, heartsick, and discouraged, hoping against hope, even praying to the Almighty to come to his assistance. He was not much of a Christian, yet had been brought up religiously, had been taught all his life to trust in a Higher Power—had been faithful in church duties, yet not entering into the work, while morally he was all that could be desired. Still he prayed earnestly for the Almighty to give him back his wife's love and affection, break down her coldness and help her to overcome if she was tempted or fascinated

with another. It was an earnest prayer he uttered there alone in his home.

Olive arrived in the city at the time appointed; her friends the Marshalls were on hand waiting for her at the depot. There was no trace upon her countenance visible of the unhappy hours she had just previously passed. She was bright, vivacious, and extremely gay as of old. They had not seen her since the wedding nearly a year before, but found her the same Olive, sweet and fascinating as ever.

They congratulated her upon her looks, inquired after Guy and all the family and made many pretty speeches about herself. She expressed her delight and thanks at their friendly greeting and no one could have told her thoughts, or what was passing through her mind then, by the expression on her countenance. It was so natural for her to deceive that she could mislead even her most intimate friends with perfect ease and composure; she had practiced the art so long that it had become a part of her nature and she knew just what move to make in order to appear at ease, even when her heart and mind were most troubled or disturbed.

A week passed by very quickly in the coming and going of many friends, shopping and visiting the parks, going down to the seashore each day, which was but a short ride; it passed really before she was aware of it. She could not possibly remain any longer though of course she was urged to do so. She had written to Guy but once; then in a perfunctory way, though he had sent her several letters and in the last one com-

plained of being lonesome, and wanted her to return at once; so after her visit was over she left her friends as quickly as she came.

She had time to reflect on her journey homeward over her trip, though it took her but a short while to go from the city to Winchester. She thought, too, of the cause which prompted her to go so suddenly and rather against the wishes of Guy, but her mind was made up, and nothing now could change her plans—nothing earthly—if the Divine interfered of course she would not utter a protest, nor would it avail her anything if she did. She had time to think this all over well before she again saw Guy. Her heart was stubborn, full of sin, of selfishness, and desires to gratify her own unbending will. She would meet him coldly, as she did not care to profess any affection for him, though she could have done so and made him happy while her heart possessed no real love for him. For some strange reason she felt very spiteful toward him, and without any cause whatever, save that she regretted her marriage to him because of the existence of Chadwick. Guy was in the way of her love. She could not let her heart go out to Chadwick, as she desired, for she already was the wife of another and under obligations binding and sacred. Moreover, Chadwick tried to avoid her as much as possible, though he loved her sincerely; owing to the fact that she was a married woman, he was too honorable to do other than that which was right. Though prior to her marriage he tried in every way to gain her, for he thought while

she yet was single he had a right to persuade her to reciprocate his love, yet when he found her so persistent and determined to go ahead with her wedding, he gave up hope and submitted to the inevitable.

Olive reached the little depot at Winchester, but Guy was not there to meet her; he had sent his carriage, not feeling well enough to ride the distance. She expected, of course to have him come for her himself, and though his coming would have brought no pleasure to her, his absence so unexpected seemed to bring less, for it made her angry and she was in no pleasant frame of mind when she reached home. She had learned from the man whom Guy had sent with the carriage that he was sick, or at least had been complaining for a day or two; still that did not have any effect upon her heart as to relenting one bit toward him.

Guy was on hand at the gate when the carriage drove up with its precious freight. He hastened to assist Olive to alight. She gave him one formal kiss and otherwise greeted him coldly, much to his surprise and disappointment. He saw at a glance that she was vexed at something, and strangely as she had previously acted, this performance on her part was extremely unkind, uncalled for, and impolite, to say the least, and Guy demanded an explanation. She would give none.

"Olive," said he, "I have made up my mind to one thing; you have no love for me; I am fully conscious of that fact and have been for some time. I will make this proposition to you after giving it much thought during your absence; you can have one week to make

up your mind what to do. If you desire to separate, I will leave it entirely with your heart, abiding by your decision, though it may kill me. My life and hope are in your hands. God knows I have suffered enough lately through your coldness and ill-treatment, and it must come to an end, for my heart is breaking, my happiness going, and my very life ebbing away." He burst into tears, strong man though he was, burying his face in his hands and sobbing aloud.

This sudden outburst of grief and eloquence on Guy's part was so unexpected by Olive that it shocked her for the moment. She hardly knew how to reply to him. Wicked as her heart was, she felt for the time deeply sorry for him, and as if she might throw herself into his arms and weep with him, and ask forgiveness, that his peace of mind might return, and they both be restored to each other's confidence and affection. But this feeling was for a moment only; then she straightened herself up with a sort of a dignified air and standing close to Guy, who had raised his head and was gazing up into those flashing black eyes that snapped with anger and resentment, as well as a bitter remorse that then seemed to overcome her, and shook her very frame, with quivering speech she said:

"I want no separation, no legal separation, or divorce —you are too exacting with me, and require too much. I gave you my heart long ago, my love, my life, and if these are not yours, Guy, then it is because you have been unable to meet them as one of my nature demands. You are selfish and narrow-minded, and always want

me in sight, or else a doubt creeps into your mind. I love excitement and company, while your nature is the reverse. How can two people of such opposite natures live in harmony? I am not prepared for a scandal such as a separation would make. I could not endure it; what would mamma and papa say? It would break their hearts. Oh, Guy, you are cruel to suggest such a thing."

Olive had other and more satisfactory plans in her mind, that would bring about a more speedy result than the law would, if they resorted to any such a measure. After a silence for some minutes, Olive was the first to speak and said: "I cannot give you an answer in so short a time, give me more than a week, give me until our wedding anniversary, then you will have your answer," and she dared to look into his face and gave him one of her sweetest smiles, which made him imagine her answer already.

Guy could do nothing but gratify the wish with the hope that the day would bring with it a happy settlement of their differences, and the old love and affection which she used to give him would return again. "Certainly, Olive, I will wait for your decision and I pray you, my darling, for such you will always be, to give me back your warmest love, that my cup of happiness may be full."

The next morning Guy did not feel well enough to move from his bed. He had contracted a severe cold, though it was in the heat of the summer, in working around his new building, getting overheated, then fool-

ishly sitting in a draft to cool off. It settled in his side at first and gave him great pain, much like an attack of the pleurisy. This sudden illness on his part seemed to affect Olive somewhat, for she tried to be pleasant and flew about to wait on him and render all the assistance possible; she insisted on sitting by him and following out the physician's directions closely, giving him such medicines as was necessary to alleviate his suffering.

Day after day went by and he did not seem to gain, but lay with a burning fever, which his disease had developed. Olive's heart relented somewhat as to her original plans; the condition of her husband had a sympathetic effect upon her mind and she had not the courage to carry out that plan, which she at first intended to do, but rather on the contrary was watchful and attentive and seeming to be deeply interested in the speedy recovery of Guy.

As the time flew by he grew worse instead of better, became weaker and weaker, and the family were alarmed at his precarious condition. A consultation was called; in the meantime he lapsed into unconsciousness and lay practically in a comatose condition. Olive was careful to keep in the sick-room as much as her strength would permit. She insisted, for some strange reason, on not having any special nurse—but members of her own family only. She managed always as far as possible to be present when the time for his medicines were at hand.

All that medical skill and nursing could do did not seem to benefit the patient, but he rather sank lower

and lower, nearer and nearer to the brink; and not until the physicians had given up all hope, and there was no possible chance of his recovery, did Olive realize the situation. Her constant watch in the sick-room completely wore her out, the heat of the season of the year, the long tedious hours of waiting and watching, the seeming anxiety on her part for his recovery had completely unnerved her, until exhausted and overcome she gave up and was compelled to abandon her vigil.

Poor Guy lay in this semi-conscious state, never once recovering from his coma, but slept on until he sank into the sleep of death on the anniversary of his marriage.

Guy was at rest, the peace he so earnestly sought and prayed for came to him in another way, and the relief which Olive had planned to bring about had come also in another form and left her alone with her wicked conscience. Of course she had the usual sympathy of many, while she was criticised harshly by others. Her uncertain and wavering life had brought Guy to his death-bed, many said, if she had always been so attentive and apparently so full of affection toward him as she was during his sickness, he might not have been brought to such a sudden end.

When Elsie Oaks was informed by the physicians that Guy's recovery was impossible, she trembled with fear—she remembered the broken mirror—and how they all made light of her prophecy. She said within a year there would be a death in the family, and now already

her worst fears were being realized. Her father, mother, and Florence could not disagree with her as before, nor did she dare mention the incident to Olive for fear it would only add to her present state of nervousness, but they all looked at each other with a knowing look, saying thereby that possibly there was something in the mysterious affair, yet they did not care to speak further of it then, only it was in their minds, and no doubt, too, in the mind of Olive. But it was no time then to discuss such matters. Finally when the grim destroyer came she fully realized that though superstitious it was an ancient belief; and dwelt generally in the hearts and minds of the ignorant, and it found lodgment in the hearts of the more educated people of the latter day—and even among her own flesh and blood.

The funeral over, Olive closed up her beautiful home and went back to her father's house at Twin Oaks, to spend her days of mourning in quiet and thought. Her married life had been brought to a sudden close. She had often hoped for a relief from those vows which seemed to have become so burdensome to her frivolous nature. Her wish was gratified, she was free now, free to pursue her course; she would be happy—she never doubted it, for secretly she was happy, but God alone must know that—free now—whether by the hand of Providence, by natural causes, or by the hand of strategy.

CHAPTER XIII.

SUNDRY HAPPENINGS.

ABOUT the time of the death of Guy Hills, Bixby received a letter from Roy Wallis of Boston, urging him to get a leave of absence for a few days to visit him, as he had some matters to talk over and plans to arrange, which would add much interest and excitement to the cause which they were both so deeply interested in.

It was no easy matter for young Bixby to get permission from his father for a few day's vacation, as he called it. He did not dare to inform his people that he was in anyway connected with an outside business venture, so pleaded that he wanted a little change from steady home life and confinement to visit Boston, where he had been invited for a few days by Mr. Wallis.

"I cannot see the necessity of your taking any vacation," said his father to him; "it seems to me the young men and women of the present generation have a good many high notions in their heads. When I was young all we thought of was working hard from morn till night, and such a thing as a vacation was never allowed us or even dreamed of by my parents. You would never have had such an idea put into your head but for that rich fellow from Boston who hangs around

here a good deal of late. I don't fancy him much, and can't understand why he has taken such a liking to you. He wears expensive clothes and always seems to have plenty of money, while you are only a son of the village postmaster, whose total income is less than a thousand dollars a year, and yours but a small part of that. Your mother and I have talked over the matter of your going away; as you have never been away from Winchester alone, we are afraid you will get lost or something will happen to you before you get back and so have made up our minds that you cannot go."

Poor young Charley was very much disappointed at the decision of his parents. He coaxed hard for them to allow him this privilege, making all sorts of promises to return within a week and to take good care of himself during the time; after much persuasion on his part they finally agreed to his going.

He reached Boston toward evening of a fine October day. Roy was on hand to meet him with his carriage and a fine span of horses. As he drove through the city on his way home, which was just on the outskirts, Bixby was wonderfully delighted with what he saw; he was unaccustomed to such sights as met his gaze, living all his life like a recluse shut up in the little rural town of Winchester. Though he had met many city people in his native town from year to year, yet this was his first visit away from home and he showed it by the way he looked about at the various objects which were brought to his view as they sped on.

Roy had a beautiful home on the upper end of one of

the finest avenues in Boston; it was the home where his mother had lived and died, and where just a short time before his father's funeral was held, and he was now sole master of the place and lived there in sumptuous style alone with the family servants; yet not alone, for he had gathered around him a number of the "smart set" whom he classed as friends and who claimed him as such, and they made frequent visits there to enjoy his hospitality.

Bixby was more than delighted from the first moment he set foot in Boston. Now that he had reached Roy's beautiful home, his delight at the surroundings could not be described in any ordinary language, while he not only enjoyed the mansion itself, but the location with so many handsome houses adjoining with their beautiful yards. To be sure he was somewhat accustomed to seeing very fine places in and around Winchester, but the great number of pretty places so close together excelled any picture which he had ever gazed upon or even dreamed of.

They finished the evening meal and repaired to the piazza to talk over the many schemes which Roy had in mind. Bixby gave him a full account of the many happenings in and around Winchester, including the scenes and incidents connected with the sickness and sudden death of Guy Hills. They discussed freely the affairs of Harry Pendleton and Elsie Oaks and made plans for future history, and wondered, now that Guy was dead, if Olive and Van would not marry at no far-distant day. Roy had gained the full confidence of

Bixby by his generous methods, and the knowledge of the fact of his wealth added much to the fascination which the young country chap had for him, so he was ready at this time to enter into a line of work no matter how mean, selfish, or unprincipled, as long as he was well-paid for it. The fact of his having money of his own gave him an air of independence, which now he could not bear the thought of losing.

The next morning was fair. Roy took his guest for a long drive in the country to show him the scenery. They drove a number of miles from the city over fine roads and passed many beautiful places which lay in and around Boston. After driving for more than an hour they came to a by-road into which Roy suddenly turned. It was like all common country roads, rough and hilly to a certain extent. It was a narrow way and one not much used apparently; it led them in through the hills until they came to a sort of an open space or level tract. From this road upon which they were traveling was a lane branching off which led into the grounds of a large, old-fashioned building that had been built for a sanitarium or private aslyum, but because of the concern not being a paying investment it had been abandoned and shut up and was now vacant.

Roy had been led to believe that if properly conducted such an institution would be a big investment on his money; besides it could be purchased now at a very low figure, because the original owners were dead and the heir was desirous of a settlement of the estate.

The building was a three-story structure, quite large

on the ground, about fifty feet square, with a tower in the center. It was built of heavy framework, thick walls, and high ceilings. The windows were protected with a grating within and without. On the whole it was a very safe place for crazy people or even those who were afflicted with weak minds and who were not safe to be at large. While out for the morning drive he thought it might interest Bixby to show him this property; at the same time he wished to carefully and thoroughly look it over, as he had to decide in a few days whether he would accept the offer which had been made to him.

The family physician had a son about the age of Roy, who was quite a chum of his and it was he who was trying to persuade Roy to buy the property. He offered to take charge of it, as he had a hobby for managing such an institution.

Roy and Bixby spent an hour or two in looking around the building; a man who lived in a cottage nearby had charge of the place, and showed them around. Roy was exceedingly pleased with the property. The purchase sum was so low that he decided to buy it for his friend then and there, and when it was on a paying basis, if he found sale for it, might sell it, or turn it over to his chum, young Dr. Birch, for the amount which it cost him. Fortunately there were but few repairs to be made upon it to put it in tenantable condition, as it had not been vacated long.

It was Dr. Birch's idea, if he could come into possession of the property, to advertise for private pa-

tients, charge a large sum for each case, give them his personal attention and make them as comfortable as money could do, and in the meantime restore them to full heath and mind, if such could be done. Roy informed the man who had charge of the property that he would see the owners that day on his return to town and have the necessary papers drawn at once for the transfer; and within a week life and bustle would be astir even in this out of the way retreat. Dr. Birch had already the promise of a half-dozen patients if he could find the right spot to locate in. They drove back to the city by another route and reached there about the middle of the afternoon.

Bixby was wonderfully pleased with his little outing. While the country around was much like that of Winchester and vicinity, yet it was new to him and refreshing to see other objects than those which he had been compelled to look upon all his life without a change.

After a good hearty luncheon, Roy went downtown to his lawyer's office to make preparation to become owner of the property in question, while Bixby went out for a short walk up one avenue and down another. Within a few squares of Roy's home he saw a large building with turrets and towers, extension and wings running both east and west.

He made his way in that direction to learn what sort of an institution it was. When within a short distance of the place he saw coming down one of the extensive gravelled walks which led out to the street proper a

young lady. Her walk, form, and face looked familiar to him at a glance. Yet, he thought he must be mistaken. Could it be possible? She was tall and angular and countrified in her appearance and resembled her closely, and as they met face to face, he saw he was right—they both spoke at once.

"Alice!"

"Charley! Why, Charley Bixby, what on earth are you doing here? you most take my breath away."

"Ha! ha! ha! why, I came to see you, of course."

"You did not know I was here, did you?"

"Oh, no, Alice, I was just fooling; I came over a few days to visit a friend here in Boston. I guess you know who he is, Roy Wallis."

"Yes, I saw him at Olive's party last summer; and is he your friend, Charley?"

"Well, yes," replied Charley, somewhat confused; "of course I never met him until Harry Pendleton brought him to Winchester to the Oaks to visit them. Being in the post office I saw him often, and he seemed to take a notion to me and invited me over to see him. Well, how long have you been here, Alice?"

"Oh, just the beginning of the term; this is the Tremont school for young ladies, and mother and father insisted on my coming here to spend a year or two, and I think it is horrid to be shut up so close and have to study. You know, Charley, the Rugers are no hands for books."

"No, I should say not, Alice," returned he.

Presumably Bixby then pictured in his mind her father

and mother who lived way back from Winchester in the "Log Holler" district, the plainest kind of people, Mr. Ruger a simple country farmer, born and brought up in the same house he now lived in.

Mrs. Ruger was an illiterate woman, the daughter of a neighboring farmer; she married young; they plodded on to gain a livelihood; the result of their union fortunately was the one daughter only, Alice, in whom they centered all their hopes and ambitions, limited though they were; and as circumstances demanded that her education should be looked after. she was sent to Boston to complete it.

"Of course your father and mother do not need much book education back there in the country, and they are too old now to commence to learn, but I should think you would be glad of the chance to get away from "Log Holler."

"Awhile, yes, I am glad, Charley, but I don't like to study."

So they chatted on for a few minutes. Bixby turned back and walked along with Alice to the corner, where they separated, after he had promised her to call in the evening as she wished to send a package back to Winchester with him for her parents. "You can leave it at Mr. Chadwick's store; mother will be there in a day or two and get it."

When Roy returned from town Bixby had news for him about meeting Alice Ruger, one of his own district people; it quite surprised him to know that she was in Boston, for he remembered her distinctly as the young

lady who managed the cream booth at Olive's party, early in the summer, though he had forgotten her name.

Charley told Roy he wished to go and spend an hour or two in the evening at the seminary, if it was agreeable to him, or if he had no other plans; Roy told him to go by all means, for he intended to spend the evening in company with Dr. Birch to talk over the business of the sanitarium.

A little later, about 7 o'clock, Bixby made his way to the Tremont Seminary and asked for Miss Ruger. He was ushered into one of the small reception parlors where the young ladies were allowed to receive callers. Miss Alice came down dressed in a becoming manner, to one of her unattractive form. Her clothes though neat were inexpensive and had an air of the country in their cut. Yet had she been dressed in any other manner it would have all been lost on him, because he was unappreciative, and not familiar with up-to-date styles, and was just as well pleased that her appearance was plain, as it was more homelike, and made him feel the less embarrassed.

"Oh, Charley, I am so glad you came to-night. I just received a lovely letter from home with lots of news in it, which, if you don't mind, I will read to you, as you know most all the people that mother writes about, and you can enjoy it as well as myself."

"Certainly, Alice, I should be pleased to hear it; go ahead and read it."

Alice straightened herself back into an easy-chair, while Bixby sat upright with folded arms trying to

be dignified. Gazing into her honest face he wondered whether she would ever know how unprincipled he was in his heart, and how villainous a scheme he had entered into with his friend Roy Wallis.

The letter read as follows:

"LOG HOLLER, Oct. 18, 18—.

"OUR DEAR ALICE: I write to tell you the news. Your father says Dan Crosby's old sorrel horse that was lame so long, died the day before Lew Jones' wife died; both were buried the same day. We have been telling the folks around that you were coming home sure for Christmas. Your father says he could not stay in Boston one night, let alone so many weeks as you have done; it is now more than five weeks you have been away. Mary Ann Horton's father and mother had their golden wedding last night; your father and I were there as well as lots of the best people from Winchester, among them Ed Bixby, the postmaster. Ed told me Charley was in Boston. I always liked Charley (this compliment paid to Bixby so unexpectedly from one of his own townspeople made him flush with embarrassment, yet he looked pleased and Alice seemed to look different to him now). Your father says you ought to have seen Ike Winters, he had his old girl there, the same one he had to our house the night you were born, nearly twenty years ago; he came over to our house that night to borrow our sausage cutter and she came along for a sleigh ride. Your father said he hated to lend anything to Ike as he never got it back. Your father says be sure and come home for Christmas. Our new woodhouse is full of cut wood ready to burn. Your father says be sure and come home for Christmas. Your father says he has put new tin around the posts

of the granary to keep out the mice, they have not bothered us so much since you went to Boston. Your father says they chewed up all his broomcorn. Be sure and come home Christmas, I am going to kill some chickens when you come; will bake up a lot of mince pies, and make a pan of crullers and pickles. We expect Remsen's folks here soon to make that visit, I hope they won't come when you are here. Jim Remsen was here on Thursday, when I told him you would be home Christmas he just hollered out you know Jim always liked you, but your father don't like Jim. Alex and John sawed wood all day Saturday and Monday. Your father, he said he saw Chadwick standing in his store door when he took a load of wood to Winchester. Your father says we won't burn so much wood now, since you left home, as we won't have fire now in the parlor; wood is cheaper, your father says, since McKinley was elected. Mort and Ves. Trainor have gone to the Klondyke; Mort sold his bay team to Seth Huggins for seventy-five dollars, and his wood-lot to Ike Winter's father for less than two hundred dollars, and took what money he had in the savings bank at Allandale—what a fool!

(At this part of the letter Bixby roared out laughing, for he met Mort in the bank at Allandale when he went to put some money in—money that he had received from Roy Wallis—just a few days before he started for Boston, and it seemed funny to him to be sitting in the parlor of Tremont Seminary and hearing read from a letter what he knew actually occurred in his own presence. He explained to Alice about the incident.)

"Your father says you might as well be in Klondyke as Boston, it is so far away from 'Log Holler.' Al Benson's wife died yesterday, and would you believe it,

while we were in church Sunday morning at Slateville, Eli Smith's mother dropped dead just after the dominie gave out his text; the text was in Jeremiah somewhere. They took her in the Sunday-school room, and the dominie finished his sermon.

"We attended two weddings last week. Mary Smith's little twins are looking fine—do come home Christmas. I am not feeling well this morning or would have wrote more, I hope the next time I will have more news to write you. Your father sends love. It rained all day Sunday and it rains now. Rufus Green has taken away the fence in front of the schoolhouse; Rufus is the trustee this year; the teacher, Miss Hobbs boards at Rufus'; your father says Rufus' son Alex is waiting on the new teacher pretty strong, she is thirty-one, he is nineteen; this is her first quarter here at Log Holler, and she fell in love with Alex the first day when he brought a load of wood to the schoolhouse, your father says Alex is a fool. Write soon.

"From your loving mother,
"KATE RUGER."

"Well, well, Alice, that is a very interesting letter indeed; your mother knows how to write the news. I am awfully glad I just happened in at this time."

Alice was much pleased at the compliment which he paid her mother. A discussion followed of all the points connected with it, each character which she had written about they were both familiar with and it carried them back to their homes and mid scenes where their hearts' best interests were located.

Bixby found the time rapidly going by before he was

aware of it. Alice seemed to him to be very interesting and apparently he was not in any hurry to go from the institution, though the rules were that at 10 o'clock the young ladies should dismiss their callers and go to their rooms.

When the time arrived for his departure, Charley said: "I have enjoyed this evening, Alice, very much," and as he took her by the hand to bid her good-by, she stood before him and did not seem nearly as awkward or as homely as he had always pictured her, or as he had known her in and around Winchester. There was a pleasant expression on her countenance as if she, too, was pleased with him and his call; his face and voice reminded her of home and of memories dear to her heart. The fact that she was a plain country girl did not deter her from possessing a heart full of love and one which could beat in unison with another heart, whether it was buried in the breast of Van Courtland Chadwick or Charley Bixby.

Bixby made his way back to Roy's home with his heart awakened to new thoughts. How could he continue to carry on his unprincipled work for Roy with the feelings which his heart now possessed? Yet how could be ever accumulate enough money to enable him to make a home for himself if he worked on in the little dingy post office at Winchester, as only an assistant to his father at such a low salary? What hope had he there of getting ahead in the world in a financial point of view? Absolutely none; so while he felt as if he would like to abandon his work for Roy, still the income tempted him to go deeper in the sin.

The next day being the third from home he already began to feel as if his visit was about over, and he told Roy either that evening or the next morning he would have to return to Winchester; but Roy would not listen to his going for at least another day, as he would like to show him around the city and again talk over some plans to be carried out later. They spent that day in going about the city visiting prominent buildings, hotels and public places, much to the delight of Bixby, who enjoyed this sort of a frolic. It gave him something to think over after his return, some food for conversation, for he knew the villagers would ask all manner of questions concerning Boston and how he enjoyed the visit. His little trip had been made public gossip at home, everybody was waiting to see Charley Bixby when he returned.

In the evening they visited the theater, the first time in his life he had ever been inside of such a place. When he gazed upon the rows and rows of cushioned seats, the proscenium boxes with their heavy hangings, and upholstery, he was charmed. The orchestra sounded forth its sweet strains of music, which added to the interest of the occasion. Long after they reached home that night, did he lie awake and live over the scenes of the play. Act I—Act II—Act III—all passing through his mind and before his eyes in one grand panorama. Charmed into wakefulness, he could not sleep. After he had viewed these pictures over and over, there was one which he could not keep out of his sight; though there was darkness in the room yet the

vision floated over his head and rested in view—Alice Ruger. All through the day he thought of her, plain country girl, but already sweet to him; many times he had met her in Winchester or in the vicinity, and always looked upon her as the daughter of the Ruger's of Log Hollow, without much apparent interest, but when he came to see her in Boston, away from the hemlocks and the pines, there seemed to be a difference.

She was still Alice Ruger, but the few weeks had tempered her somewhat and brought to her ways a little new culture, and to her step a little grace, though she would, perhaps, always be a little awkward as she was so angular in her build that it would take years at least to make her graceful in every movement; but pshaw, what did he care?

He already regarded her with more than a passing thought and if she gave him any encouragement he could overlook what once might have been impossible.

The next morning he left Boston for home, Roy going with him to the station and bidding him an adieu after exacting a fresh promise from him that he would carry out his wishes. Roy had handsomely rewarded Bixby for coming over to see him. He paid all his expenses and gave him a roll of bills, not even looking at the amount, which was something more than a hundred dollars. As the train rolled away, Roy thought: "Well, I have got that fellow under my thumb nicely —we will set all Winchester agog yet with excitement if I live, if I can only depend upon his doing what I want him to do. I shall have revenge, sweet revenge, upon Harry Pendleton and his *fiancée*."

CHAPTER XIV.

OFF WITH THE OLD LOVE.

THE death of Guy Hills cast a gloom over the home at Twin Oaks. Mr. and Mrs. Oaks had learned to love Guy very much, had known him so many years and had looked upon him as their son-in-law long before the day he married Olive. Because of the many years he had associated with the family it was evident to them that these associations would naturally terminate as they did, as his attentions were always more or less confined to their daughter Olive. Hence when death came into the new home so unexpectedly, it brought deep sorrow to their hearts, taking away a loved member of their circle, and marring their daughter's happiness (as they supposed).

Florence Wood, in the short time that she had been a member of the household, had learned to admire Guy very much. His quiet ways, steady habits, and polite manners had endeared him to all. Olive surely had the deep sympathy of her whole family in her loss, whether it was appreciated or not by her.

The sudden calamity which befell them had changed all their plans. Elsie was to have been married just about the time of Guy's death, or a little later in the

season, and now it was indefinitely postponed or rather put off for at least a whole year, as she was really superstitious now and resolved that a wedding and a funeral should not take place in the same year in one household. The broken mirror was still fresh in her mind, all the thoughts of that hour she lived over again, and now that her prophecies had been fulfilled she was even more surprised and superstitious than before; so while Guy's death brought sorrow to her heart, she was doubly afflicted, for it brought the great disappointment of her wedding being postponed along with it; yet she submitted to it all cheerfully, though her heart was sorely grieved by the sudden break in her plans.

Poor Harry was making arrangements for his wedding when he received word of Guy's fatal illness, and later the message came announcing his death. He knew then it would be useless to make any further plans, for he was well aware of Elsie's views upon such matters, for he had heard her often express herself since the accident of the broken mirror; so when he read and reread the telegram announcing Guy's death, his heart sank within him, coupled with feelings of sympathy and regrets for all concerned.

Guy had been dead now for a number of weeks. The cold, cheerless winds began to blow from the north; the country already had a forsaken appearance; frost had turned and made brown the foliage; the lawns no longer had their fresh, green appearance; the far-off hills to the west looked gray and cold under the November skies. The dull and drear season harmonized with

the situation of matters in general at "Twin Oaks;" though as time sped on the first shock wore off and their feelings became more normal, for they had all become somewhat accustomed to their loss and submitted to the will of a Higher Power.

Van Courtland Chadwick, the village merchant, had been a caller at the Oaks' home, ever since he had been a resident of Winchester, and the fact that Olive again was installed there as a permanent resident did not keep him from the place by any means. Inwardly it was a source of much happiness to him that she was there even under the existing circumstances, though he did not dare breathe one word of the fact to a soul; not even to Olive had he spoken of his feelings in any way, for since the death of her husband he had seen very little of her, and then only in her own home in the presence of some of the family. She had not been to the village since his death nor away from her father's house; gossip was pretty strong against her and she knew it. Kind, sympathizing friends always stand ready to tell what they hear outside, and they made no exception in this case, but ran to her with every little bit of news; so consequently she kept close at home.

Van found occasion to visit at "Twin Oaks" rather more since Olive came than previously. While he never made any special inquiry for her, yet he managed to see her always before he departed, though it was in the presence of others.

This apparent lack of anxiety on her part to be in his presence was only a ruse, just for effect, that her family

might not become acquainted with the feelings which her heart possessed for him, though she yet loved him with a warm, passionate love that sooner or later must become known, despite her trying to guard it. Van could read the expression of love which she entertained for him through the fond gaze of her lovely eyes, and the sweet smile which she always gave to him; yet he wondered how long she would continue suppressing her feelings, for her nature was a very peculiar one, and he was fully aware of it.

It was a few months after Guy's death, one bitter cold day in the month of March, when Van called on Olive. It was rather late in the afternoon when he reached the house; it had been snowing all the day long and business was extremely dull at the store, and feeling lonesome, he suddenly made up his mind to go up to "Twin Oaks" and spend the evening. So, putting on his heavy top coat, he left word with Spence King, his clerk, that he would not be back, and to close up the store early and come up to the house and they would return together.

Spence, too, was always welcome at the Oaks home; they had known him many years; Olive always admired him—he was one of her many friends. Then Florence Wood was there, which added to the attraction for him. He had spent considerable of such leisure time as he had in her company. She was young, gay, and fascinating. Though divorced from her husband, that fact did not seem to deter the young men of the village from calling on her; they all sympathized with

her in her trouble and knew the whole history of her sad experience in her own home in the West, and as if to help her forget her sorrow, they considered her as one of their own number, and entitled to all the social respect that Winchester afforded.

Olive met Van at the door and ushered him in out of the cold and gave him an extremely cordial greeting. He was delighted to find that she had resumed much of her former self; she chatted away in her usual manner, which gave Van an opportunity to cast aside all formality on account of her recent trouble, and they talked upon subjects nearer to their hearts' interest.

The room in which they were sitting looked out upon the lawn toward the south; the air was filled with flying snowflakes that were tossed about in every direction by the wind, which blew with great force, and the picture which presented itself to their gaze was beautiful to behold and can only be seen in a like country place, where hills, vales, farmlands, and the surrounding treetops are all white, made so by the Almighty, to cover the earth from its drear and gloom with a mantle of purity, a snowy whiteness. There is no prettier picture to the country-born being than the earth covered with snow; home is never more appreciated than when the wind is howling without and the fast-falling flakes are chasing each other in midair.

Such was the panorama which they beheld from the windows of that room. Alone again for the first time since death had claimed him who stood in Olive's way, in her heart's way, alone with him who so often

she had plead with to listen to her story of love, and who always raised his hand in warning: "Hush! Olive, you have no right, you are a married woman." Now it was different, so different. Olive did not have to plead with him to listen; but Van was eager to catch every word that fell from her lips. He had longed for such an opportunity, and it had come to him; death had removed the one whose place he felt ought to have been his. Poor misguided man; how unfortunate for him he ever met her; how unfortunate for Guy!

But a short while after Van had arrived at the house, a covered sleigh drawn by a single horse came slipping along swiftly over the snow, up the winding driveway to the front of the porch; a man alighted from within, and to their surprise it was Harry Pendleton.

Elsie, with Florence, was gazing out of a window from the second story and saw the sleigh stop in front of the house, but from her position could not see who the passengers were. When she heard Olive call out to Harry, she ran down the steps rapidly, and met him at the door. She was wild with delight at seeing her lover so unexpectedly.

Harry embraced her affectionately and imprinted upon her sweet lips many warm kisses of greeting. Harry thought to surprise Elsie and came without sending her word. The long, stormy day and the cold blasts of wind howling around the corners of the house had brought with it a sadness to Elsie. She not alone thought of herself. Longing so to see Harry of course made her lonesome, despite the fact of the presence of

Florence; but she thought of the many poor people who lived in and around Winchester who had not such a bright, cheerful home as she. Though the majority of its inhabitants were not of the poorer class, yet there were a few as is found in every community, and it was they to whom her heart, so full of sympathy, went out after on this bleak March day.

She grew sad from her thoughts, and as she pondered over them, she pressed her cheek against the window-pane and gazed down the roadway toward the village. Florence noticed her quiet manner and in her laughing way said: "Looking for Harry, Elsie?"

"I am always looking for him, Florence."

She had scarcely said the words, when the sleigh halted in front of the house and he alighted.

Before Florence recovered from her astonishment, Elsie was below welcoming Harry; she left the lovers to themselves while she remained upstairs and took the seat just vacated by Elsie. She, too, watched the storm from the window; the little flakes were coming down from the regions above thick and fast, and as they were caught up by the fierce wind which blew a gale, her mind wandered away to her Western home, and brought back memories anything but pleasant to her heart. She had been a resident of Twin Oaks some months and had learned to love the home and its surroundings; her relatives were kind to her; they tried in every way to help her to forget her unhappy condition.

They had in a great measure been a blessing to her,

and had succeeded in bringing back much of her gay spirit and life, which almost was ruined and crushed out by the ties which bound her to a dissipated husband. Though she was free from him now, on a day like this when all nature without was so disturbed, no sunshine to brighten one's way, she grew despondent and no one could blame her.

Olive was below with Van; she already knew that they had much regard for each other, as of late many hints were given her by Olive regardless of the short time since the death of Guy; now Elsie, too, was with her lover, receiving his embraces and caresses and she was alone with her thoughts. Her parents were in constant communication with her, and much as they desired to see her, urged her not to get homesick, but stay for an indefinite period, until she had surely recovered her health and until the scandal of her separation and divorce beame a history of the past.

Although she was deeply sympathized with by her many friends in the vicinity of her own home, yet the fact of coming in contact with them at every turn was the prime cause of her coming to Winchester; every face there brought back memories which freshened her trouble, and sad experience, so to avoid all this she preferred to make new acquaintances, which she had done without number.

Night was now coming on fast and the storm apparently was increasing; she turned away from the window as the trees and hills were no longer visible; they all resembled a mantle of whiteness and no other object

was visible, but snow, snow, snow; she threw herself down upon a sofa to further meditate upon her future prospects and whether her visit, prolonged now to many months, ought not to end. How much longer would she have to stay? She, too, was dreadfully disappointed over the sudden postponement of Elsie's wedding; she intended immediately afterward to return home, but now as the plans were all changed she hardly knew how to decide.

Her parents had written her to stay as long as she could be contented and happy. While she was as happy as possible there, yet she often longed for home. Her father's business would not permit him to be away any length of time, so they could not come to Winchester to see her. While in the midst of these thoughts a rap on the door aroused her from her comfortable position.

It was her aunt, Mrs. Oaks, who informed her that Spence King was below in the parlor and wished to see her.

"See me, auntie? Ha, ha! I suppose Olive and Elsie having company, I am next in line."

"Oh, no, Florence; I guess he came particularly to see you; I have noticed of late he pays you many pretty compliments and gives you lots of sweet smiles."

"Oh! that is his way, auntie, I know he likes Olive, and I think if the truth were known she is his choice."

"I can't quite agree with you, Florence; Spence and Olive have been friends from little children you know, and when the girls went to school at Annandale, at

King's Seminary, why he at that time was in school and with them in many of the same studies. He has visited her often, but his visits are just friendly with us, that is all."

"True, you may think so, auntie, but because they have known each other since they were children, it does not follow there cannot exist a feeling more than friendship between them; I have positive evidence Olive more than likes Spence King, said Florence," as she hastened to adjust her hair, and finish a few touches to her toilet before going down to meet him; "and I like him, too, auntie, ha ha!"

Florence came tripping down into the parlor where Spence, Olive, Van, Elsie and Harry were assembled, waiting her coming before going to the dining room to partake of the evening meal.

It was a happy little party of young people, who sat down to the Oak's table that winter evening, and the first bit of real life that they had enjoyed since the death of Guy, and was entirely informal, too; much of the seeming cold restraint was forcibly laid aside or held in a state of abeyance, for the time at least, yet it was no ordinary little party either.

A widow, young, comparatively rich, and exceedingly pretty; a divorced woman, fascinating and wonderfully interesting, whose looks would compare favorably with the best; sweet little Elsie, the promised wife; Harry, a keen, young, rising lawyer, cultured, and a gentleman of good old stock; Chadwick, rather on the bachelor order, fine-looking and an interesting ac-

quaintance; and last but not least by any means, Spence, who had begun to look upon Olive with much favor since the death of Guy and whose visits at "Twin Oaks," had been about as frequent as Van's.

It was supposed by Mr. and Mrs. Oaks he was quite fascinated with their niece, Florence, but she had hinted to her aunt that evening that his coming was not alone on her account, for she knew that there was much truth coupled with her remark; more than she cared to explain then to her aunt.

On the whole, the little party of lovers and would-be lovers were surrounded by many curious facts and little incidents. They all seemed to have a history, and it was singular enough all should meet together so unexpectedly. Yet they enjoyed the hours together though it was the foundation of more trouble for all.

The human heart is a mystery. Some cannot be moved from their first decision; no temptation no matter how inviting could swerve them from the promise, from the love, the sincerity, the affection which it possesses for another. Such hearts are carried about in the bosom of the good, whether belonging to man or woman. But there are those creatures about us, victims of the tempter, who break vows, who trample down true love under their feet as of no value, who are murderers at heart, who love the smile of many faces, who are unfaithful, whose end is death, and whose memory soon fades and they are forgotten except for their evil deeds; such hearts are carried about in the bosom of the wicked.

CHAPTER XV.

ELSIE'S ABDUCTION.

THE beautiful days of springtime again had come; the warm sun had brought out the early buds and flowers and clothed all the land. The sweet-scented pines and hemlocks wore their cloth of green once more, the dead red twigs had fallen to the earth and in their place were new ones, full of life and God-given vigor. The green fields looked inviting to the cattle, and the sheep fed again upon the hillside, from nature's fresh supply.

One day, about the middle of the month of May, a telegram was received at the little office at Winchester for Elsie Oaks, signed by Judge Pendleton. It read as follows:

"Harry very ill, come at once; will meet you on arrival of express."

Bixby carried the frightful message to Twin Oaks and delivered it in person to Elsie.

The sudden and unexpected news threw her into a state of nervousness at once; she was almost wild with grief and hardly knew what to do. Her father had gone away for a day or two on important business with

Olive, relative to the settling up of the estate of Guy in some way, and her mother was quite ill and needed Florence to look after her; so the poor child was compelled to start at once for Boston alone, as she would not listen to her mother nor Florence, who tried to persuade her to wait until morning, when her father was expected home; then he would accompany her. But excited and worried at the supposed condition of her lover, thinking, perhaps, any delay might cause him to grow worse, or he might be unconscious and not recognize her, she felt she must hasten. She gathered up a few of her belongings and caught the first express passing through Winchester for Boston.

It was done in such great haste she hardly had time to say good-by, nor scarcely realized what she had undertaken. Her mind was upset upon receiving such cruel news, for the very same morning she had received a long letter from him and while no mention was made of being ill—she was sure he had been hurt in some way, and, perhaps fatally, too.

Oh! if the judge had only explained more in his telegram; the suspense was terrible. As the train sped on her thoughts traveled much faster—maybe he has had some difficulty with Roy Wallis and is seriously injured. "Oh, God! I hope not, my poor Harry, my poor Harry." She burst into tears.

Fortunately there were but few passengers in the car and the rumble and roar of the train made it impossible for any one to hear her sob, though she stifled the

noise which the outbreak of her feelings made to some degree.

On the flying express went, whirling by and through beautiful wooded sections, into deep cuts, then out again, over the level country, passing farmhouses, grain fields, and meadow lands, through the smaller towns toward the city. At any other time she would have been delighted to gaze out of the windows at the panorama.

After a tedious and extremely lonesome ride she reached Boston, for she had not spoken a word to a soul; her heart was too full of deep sorrow for her suffering lover to engage in conversation with any one, even if she had the opportunity; quiet thought and prayerful meditation was more comforting to her than anything else just at that trying hour. On alighting from the train and passing out through the depot, she looked around in confusion for the judge; he was nowhere to be seen, which only added more sorrow to her already breaking heart, for it would have relieved her considerably to have seen him coming up to greet her, even though his countenance might have worn a sad expression.

The omnibus and hack-driver yelled into her ears for her patronage, and just as she was about to accost an officer who was standing near by, wearing the railroad company's uniform, to ask him which conveyance to take for Judge Pendleton's house, for she thought most every one would know him he being such a prominent lawyer there for so many years, a man dressed in a

coachman's suit, dignified in appearance and easy in his manner, touched her lightly upon the shoulder and as Elsie suddenly turned around, he tipped his hat gracefully and said:

"I beg pardon, miss; are you not looking for Judge Pendleton?"

"Oh, yes," said Elsie, "I am."

"Well, I have a note from him to you."

The man handed Elsie a letter which was not sealed. It was addressed to her in a neat, bold handwriting. She hastily read its lines which were:

"MY DEAR ELSIE: The bearer of this note, my coachman, will bring you at once to Harry; give your luggage into his care. In haste, I would say, Harry is conscious and anxiously waiting to see you. He received a serious injury yesterday evening while returning to town; he is now in a farmhouse a few miles from the city; we trust to be able to move him home in a few days. Mrs. Pendleton insisted on my not leaving his bedside or I would have come for you myself. Hoping to see you very shortly—

"I am sincerely
"JUDGE P——."

A great load was lifted from Elsie's heart and mind after she read the letter, and without asking any questions she handed the coachman what little luggage she had brought and entered the carriage, while he mounted the box and hurriedly drove away.

She read and reread the letter, gaining much comfort from its lines; finally she settled back on the heavy-cushioned seat and rested her aching head against the

upholstery within. They rode on at a rapid rate through the city and out in the open country; for how long she did not know; in her haste she had come away without her timepiece and could not judge whether she had been in the carriage one hour or two, she never gave it a thought, and was only restless to reach her journey's end. At any rate she could not have told the time for darkness was fast settling upon the surrounding country and she could not see even out of the carriage window.

Suddenly the vehicle halted; the driver jumped down from his seat and flung open the door, assisting Elsie to alight; a man came walking down the path at a rapid gait and said to the driver in a quick, sharp voice:

"Is this Miss Oaks?"

Elsie replied, "Yes, sir."

"Make haste!" said he; "for young Mr. Pendleton is sinking."

Poor Elsie almost fainted at his remarks and would have fallen had he not caught her; taking her by the arm he said to her, "Come, miss, this won't do."

Elsie walked by his side, neither looking to the right nor left. They went up the path to the house, in through a hallway to the second floor. She did not notice anything peculiar as she passed along through the hall, nor when she ascended the stairs to the floor above; yet she seemed to hear voices, coming from whence she could not tell, nor even stopped to think, she was only anxious to see her lover who now was dying.

She was ushered into a large, square room, elegantly furnished. The man told Elsie to be seated and he would return presently; he went out of another door from which they entered.

She was only too glad to take a seat, for she was about exhausted after her experience of the last few hours, and particularly on arriving at the house and learning of Harry's serious condition.

She looked about the room, which was lighted from a chandelier, having globes of tinted glass of different colors which threw lovely shadows around. Expensive furnishings, rich carpets, and costly pictures hung about the wall; everything about bore the positive evidence of wealth.

After waiting a few moments she became worried at the delay. She arose from her seat and walked the floor backward and forward a few times; still he did not come. Her heart began to beat wildly at this strange proceeding; she listened at the door where the man had gone, something which she had never been guilty of in her life—of eavesdropping; yet she listened; not a sound could she hear. Her heart almost stood still at the awful feeling which came over her at that moment; she became desperate and boldly took hold of the knob of the door as if to open it and see what was beyond.

She hesitated; she heard footsteps along the hall near the door by which she came in, on the opposite side of the room, but they soon died out and a dreadful hush came over the place. Determining to know what it

meant—if Harry was sinking why did not they tell her, as they could not have forgotten her presence in the house—she tried the door and "Oh, God!" it was locked!

She flew across the room to the other door and to her horror she found it would not give; that too was locked!

What did it mean? She went to the window on one side of the room, and flung back the heavy, costly curtains; she found to her astonishment and surprise grating both on the inside and out. Then to the other window on the opposite end of the room—that was likewise grated. She tried to reach the chandelier to turn up the light, but found she was too short, so she stood on a chair to reach the jet when, turning up the gas higher and jumping down from the chair, the light threw its rays on a large oil painting which hung on the wall.

To her surprise and horror it was the picture of Roy Wallis; she gave a loud scream and fell in a dead faint upon the floor.

When Elsie came to consciousness she lay in bed in an adjoining room, her garments arranged in perfect order. She was wrapped in a beautiful and costly night robe and everything about was managed by some mysterious skilled hand.

It was morning, the sun streamed through the windows into her room and threw their soft, delicate rays upon the heavy velvet carpet; she sat upright in bed and gazed around bewildered.

"Where am I?" she exclaimed aloud.

Instantly a middle-aged woman who was sitting in the room where Elsie first was imprisoned, appeared, coming up to the bed. Elsie gave a start at this strange face, and before she could make any exclamation, the woman quietly said: "Better lay down, miss, and not excite yourself. You have been awfully sick; you are to be my patient now; if you are careful in a few days you will be well again."

"Where am I?" asked Elsie again; "I am not sick, I came to see Harry."

"Yes, dear, you have been ill," said the woman, ignoring her remark about Harry. "You have been sick for some time they tell me, and you were brought here to take treatment; this is a lovely home for invalids."

"If this is a lovely home for invalids, why are these doors locked, these windows barred, and why is there such secrecy about the place? I demand some explanation," said Elsie, flinging back the covers as she bounced out of the bed on to the floor and started to get her clothing.

The woman tried to calm her; caught her by the shoulders, pushing her quietly back toward the bed; but the spirit of defiance was aroused in Elsie's breast; she fought her nurse, as she might be termed, with a will, until she became exhausted from lack of strength, for she had partaken of no food since she left her home the day before, and was in a weak condition.

She finally obeyed the wishes of her attendant and lay down upon the bed again. Her head was aching

ready to burst; her eyes snapped with indignation and rage at the abuse and ill treatment which she was compelled to submit to under the direction of her enemy, Roy Wallis; for now she began to realize the whole affair was a farce from beginning to end. The fact of Judge Pendleton's sending her the telegram was a lie and sending the note with his coachman was another, worse than the former; all planned by that miserable fiend, Roy Wallis, to tear her away from Harry, and he, whom she thought ill, suffering, and dying, was no doubt well and at present little dreamed of her position or condition.

"Oh, God! why am I made the victim of such atrocities? I pray Thee to bring a swift judgment upon the ones connected with this shameful affair." These thoughts and more flashed through her mind while she lay with her face toward the wall and a shooting pain through her heart; and grieved in such a manner, angered to such a height that tears could not flow, she suffered the very tortures of death, yet death came not to relieve her.

Her mamma and papa—what would they think had become of her? Harry would be looking for a reply to his letter of the day before, and she was helpless to reply.

What consternation there would be, what unhappiness would follow, what suffering and pain when the discovery was made that she had been spirited away and held somewhere a prisoner. She had no idea where she was, whether in one direction or another

from Boston, but she realized this much that she was in some place unknown to the outside world where soon death would come and relieve her suffering.

She fell into a sleep from mere exhaustion, and when she awoke an hour or two later, it was not to consciousness; for she had a raging fever, with her mind already unbalanced by the suffering which she had gone through within the last few hours. The woman who had been instructed to care for Elsie was thoroughly posted upon the whole ignominious affair, and furthermore was cautioned to use no harsh means in any manner with her and give every attention in case of sickness following her imprisonment.

When Elsie left Winchester she promised to send a telegram to her home as soon as she arrived at Judge Pendleton's house; it was 1 o'clock when she left the little depot at Winchester, it took five hours or so to reach Boston, they ought to have received a telegram about the condition of things there the same evening.

When the next morning came with no news, and hour after hour went by without the expected message, they grew fearful something had happened to her. Mr. Oaks and Olive returned home the same day after her departure, and when he learned the particulars concerning the telegram which called Elsie away was much astonished. Early the next morning he went to Winchester to the telegraph office, which was in the rear of the post office, and managed by Bixby's father, to learn if possible of any news from his daughter. Mr. Bixby told him he had received but the one message, and he

himself was anxious to hear what the trouble was and could not understand why they hadn't received the second telegram.

Oliver Oaks dispatched a message forthwith to the judge, making inquiry concerning Harry's condition and of Elsie's safe arrival, and imagine his surprise when the reply flashed back:

"Harry was well and they did not understand what he meant by Elsie's safe arrival."

Mr. Oaks drove back in great haste when he learned this startling news to see if those at home could interpret what it all meant. His sudden announcement that Elsie had not been seen at Pendleton's house, and that Harry was well, threw them into great excitement.

The news spread rapidly in and about Winchester of the facts of the case as far as they knew them; dispatches were sent to and fro all the day long.

The Pendletons left Boston in great haste for Twin Oaks, arriving there the same evening. Harry was terribly upset by the time he reached Winchester. He wore a wearied, anxious look as he drove from the station accompanied by his father and mother to Twin Oaks.

He found the Oaks' family up in arms over the strange incident; all were put to their wits' end to know just how to proceed; in fact were waiting their coming before taking any new step. They had already tried every way to find where Elsie had gone after reaching Boston; but the depot anthorities had no recollection of seeing such a party arriving there from

Winchester the day before, so could give no information concerning her disappearance. There being nothing unusual in her appearance, manner, or dress to excite the notice of any one, they were unable to bring her to memory. Harry at once when he heard the full explanation of the sad affair knew where to lay the blame; he charged Roy Wallis with the scheme of enticing her from home, employing the ruse of a false telegram. His rage knew no bounds and he would shoot him at first sight and send him to his death without any mercy.

Poor Bixby knew the whole truth of the matter and half-resolved to undo the terrible wrong which he had done and go to Twin Oaks, make a clean breast of the facts, and inform them where they could find Elsie. He had partly come to this conclusion because he so deeply sympathized with Elsie—being now in love himself with Alice Ruger, corresponding regularly with her and finding in her much depth of character from the beautiful letters which he received from her—she had touched the finer feelings of his heart and when he came to himself he realized his awful crime in assisting Roy to accomplish his revenge. But the fear as to how he would be treated in the affair, if he made any confession, by the Oaks' family, or what manner of revenge Roy might take if he did, or whether Alice would cast him off as a traitor, all held him from carrying out his good purpose, and he finally decided to keep the secret within his own breast, as no manner of suspicion was held against him in any way.

It was fully six months since his trip to Boston and he told no one of his ride out to the Birch asylum with Roy; consequently they could not connect his visit there with this awful crime.

Harry Pendleton explained fully to Mr. and Mrs. Oaks and his own father and mother all the efforts of Wallis in his visits at Twin Oaks to set Elsie against him; how he had insulted him in different ways; how he had annoyed Elsie with letters and of their final break in friendship forever at Olive's party. It was there Roy swore he would have revenge on him, and true to his word he had carried it out, and completely outwitted them all and imprisoned Elsie, and placed her beyond their reach. They must find her at any cost and punish him no matter how great the sacrifice would be or the length of time it took.

Harry had not seen Roy since the night of Olive's party, now nearly a year ago, and had come to the conclusion he had given up any idea of revenge. Though he had often expected to meet him, yet somehow did not; their places of residence in Boston was not many squares apart, though in a different section of the city and since Roy came into possession of so much wealth he moved into another circle of friends than his former one, where his time was spent more in the pursuits of pleasure than business. It is not necessary for the writer of this story to go into detail as to how the absence of Elsie affected her people and friends beyond the fact that it completely prostrated her mother.

Even Olive was very much shocked at the sudden

manner in which her sister was torn away from them, and by the thought that she, perhaps, would never lay eyes on her again. Mr. Oaks suffered his part in silence; it took all his strength to keep Elsie's mother in check, for she grieved over her daughter more, a thousand times more, than if they had seen her dead body lowered in the grave; for now she might be in want or suffering from ill treatment, sick, or even dead! Oh, if they could only know her whereabouts.

The next day, which was the third day from home, they started for Boston. Mr. Oaks accompanied Judge Pendleton and his son, while Mrs. Pendleton remained at Twin Oaks with Florence and Elsie's mother.

They first visited the home of Wallis, but were informed there by his housekeeper that he had not been in the city for at least two weeks; she thought he had gone abroad as he left word it might be some months before he would be back. They tried in every way to question her, but succeeded in learning nothing beyond this fact. His bankers were ignorant of his whereabouts, or at least they would give no information concerning him, simply stating he was out of the city for an indefinite period of time. Thus, wherever they went they could learn nothing of him; for days and days they searched for her, advertising, offering large sums as a reward, yet no tidings came relative to her place of abode.

Mr. Oaks returned home discouraged and disheartened, but tried to be brave on account of his wife, who grew worse instead of better as the days passed and no

news came from Elsie. The Pendletons as well as Mr. Oaks spent weeks of time and thousands of dollars in employing detectives; they watched Roy's home and every place where he might be found; they went to London, Paris, whither they thought he might have gone, and after vainly searching were compelled to give up in despair.

Mrs. Oaks was a comparative invalid; Harry a mere wreck of his former self at the loss of his expected bride.

Roy Wallis was a miserable wretch to punish an innocent, sweet girl, because her heart could not respond to his love; the worst death would be the lightest punishment for his awful crime. While he not only made her suffer beyond description he broke her mother's heart, made life sad for her father, destroyed the happiness of Harry, and cast a gloom over two households, surpassing anything before ever known by his fiendishness and deviltry; all the powers of the infernal regions let loose upon him would not be even just punishment for so great a crime.

All Winchester was astir over this affair. It was the talk for days and days. Every one wondered where poor Elsie could be and if they would ever see her again. Could her friends have set eyes upon Roy Wallis they would have given him their revenge, which would have been swift and sure, but they were helpless in the matter; beyond offering their sympathy to the family they could be of no assistance whatever.

Poor Florence Wood had experienced much trouble

already in her young life, but this affliction so suddenly cast upon her uncle and aunt plunged her in new sorrow; she forgot all the past, her own sad past, in this distress, and wept with the rest afresh, hoping against hope, praying that God might give them back their darling, their sweet blonde Elsie, the joy of the household, the sunshine of the home.

Roy Wallis, your punishment awaits you.

CHAPTER XVI.

DR. BIRCH'S PATIENT.

THE reader is partially acquainted with the place where Elsie is confined as a prisoner; a limited description was given of it in a former chapter.

When Bixby visited Roy in Boston a number of months previous, he was informed of the plan of buying the property. The idea of the abduction came into his head after Dr. Birch suggested his purchasing it; immediately Satan made it plain to him that it would be valuable in accomplishing his fiendish purpose if he owned such a place and had a suitable man to manage it.

Dr. Birch was a young man about the age of Roy. As their fathers had been fast friends, it was perfectly natural the sons should be; he was well-educated and thoroughly understood medicine in all its branches, and possessed a peculiar fascination for taking care of the insane. He was a man who lacked principle, and would enter into almost any kind of transaction in his own line, where money was the reward.

Dr. Birch knew of Roy's love for Elsie; had learned the whole history by heart; so when Roy suggested to him the idea of enticing her to Boston on the

pretext which he used, he fell in with the plan at once, for he foresaw a valuable patient in her; so they arranged the whole affair before Roy bought the property.

All this was told to Bixby, and for a special sum of money he was to inform Roy, from week to week, of all the news concerning Elsie and Harry. When everything was ready for action the fatal telegram was to be sent which brought Elsie to Boston.

The rooms in which Elsie was held a prisoner had never been used before; they were fitted up for her in gorgeous style. Roy looked after the furnishings and fixtures himself, and spared no pains nor expense to make the little place a perfect paradise of beauty.

To make it very secure, brass gratings were fastened in front of the windows, rods running up and down and then across making it very safe; it was impossible when she was left alone to break out; the windows could be raised in perfect safety for air.

A beautiful bathroom connected with her sleeping room, and though a prisoner she had all the comforts and conveniences of a modern home. There were but six people in the secret of Elsie's abduction, viz., Roy, Dr. Birch, Bixby and three of the trusted employees of the asylum—the coachman, the general man, who came down to the carriage and assisted Elsie to the house, and the woman who acted in the capacity of nurse; they all were sworn to secrecy and could be trusted.

In the previous chapter we left Elsie in an uncon-

scious state under the care of Mrs. Blake, a woman of experience in that line. She was a good judge of human nature, and so dealt with patients according as the hour demanded.

As poor Elsie was not insane, far from it, it was even less difficult for her nurse to quiet her; for she did not have that stubbornness to combat with that is so common among the insane. By gentle means she could subdue her, even though Elsie was wild with rage at the treatment which she had been subjected to by the unmitigated rascal, Roy Wallis.

When Elsie came to consciousness and was able to converse it was the middle of the next day, and though at first her mind seemed a little clouded and she could not realize just where she was, yet soon the vision of doubt cleared away and the scene of the evening or two before came vividly back to her. She saw her helplessness, fully realizing now she was held a prisoner in the house which, presumably, was some sort of an asylum, confined to these rooms with Mrs. Blake as her guard, under the power of Roy Wallis.

Later in the day, when Elsie felt a little stronger, she called Mrs. Blake to the bedside and said to her: "I understand now all; I am held a prisoner here at the hands of Roy Wallis."

"I know nothing, my dear," said Mrs. Blake, "about you being here at the will of Mr. Wallis. You were brought here as one who had some deep trouble and came for rest, and my instructions were to keep you as quiet as possible, and not to have you excite yourself."

"I deny it, I came myself, deceived by a false telegram, lured here by that coward; I promise you, Mrs. Blake, that as God is my judge, that man will suffer for this wrong."

"Oh! child, do not talk so about one who is your benefactor; who has given you such nice, comfortable quarters. Yes, more than that, look around at these elegant furnishings; your every comfort is so graciously provided for. I am as much a prisoner as you; I cannot leave these rooms; I must be on hand to assist you and care for you; yet I do not complain; I love to minister to the sick and suffering."

"I am not sick," said Elsie, "only the excitement which I have gone through these last three days has brought upon me this temporary illness, and I do not need your assistance—only my release. Unbar these doors which hold me here as a prisoner and how long would I remain? I care not for myself, Mrs. Blake, but for my poor darling Harry, my precious mother and father, who worship me almost and I them; I care not how much I suffer, only send them word that I am here; oh, no, I presume you would not do that; then send them word I am alive and well, and hope to reach home soon; do this for me, please do. Oh, my God! why am I so forsaken by Thee?"

Elsie cried as if her heart would break. Even the cold-hearted Mrs. Blake was visibly affected by Elsie's grief, but she insisted upon the fact that she, too, was held a prisoner within those rooms, as there was a guard in the hall who locked and unlocked the door,

when it was necessary to enter with food or other necessities.

"Calm yourself, Miss Oaks," said she.

Elsie gave a sudden start when she heard the woman call her "Miss Oaks."

"How did you know my name?" said Elsie.

"Oh, the doctor told me a Miss Oaks was coming here."

"What doctor?"

"Why, Dr. Birch who owns this place."

"Dr. Birch who owns this place?" said Elsie; "then why is Roy Wallis' picture hanging in the next room; what is that doing here?"

"Oh, Dr. Birch and Mr. Wallis are friends," said Mrs. Blake.

"Yes, I see it all now," was Elsie's reply.

Mrs. Blake realized she had told too much to Elsie; still she knew that Elsie was no more an invalid or ill than she was. She was aware, too, that Elsie had fully grasped the situation; that through the infamous work of Roy Wallis she had been fooled, and the wretch had trapped her nicely, and as the hours passed by she became more and more satisfied that it would possibly be a long time before she would be released from this place.

She must live to see him and his hellish plots punished. She prayed God to spare her life, though the suffering which she was called to pass through was something indescribable; the anxiety for her lover's thoughts, her mother and home almost crushed her life

out; but she must submit and live in hope of communicating with them in some way, that they might learn of her whereabouts. She had not the slightest idea where she was, no more than that she was shut up in some sort of a hotel or asylum; the walls of the building were thick and sometimes for hours she would scarcely hear a souud.

Things ran along pretty much in the same manner for at least a week. Though the confinement and worry told on her greatly, yet she managed to survive withal. Mrs. Blake lied to her when she told her that she too was a prisoner there; for after Elsie had been there a day or two, she would go to the door of the large room, the one by which Elsie was first ushered in, and give a slight rap twice; it would open as if by magic from without, just a little way, and she would slip out, and the door would shut up quickly and be bolted. Sometimes she would be gone a few minutes, then again for an hour or more; of course Elsie did not know where she went nor for what purpose.

During this time Elsie had not seen Dr. Birch, whom Mrs. Blake talked so much about, nor Roy, but she had not long to wait to have her anxiety relieved in this regard; she thought it very strange if Roy had caused her to be imprisoned there, where he could be during this time.

It was either the eighth or ninth day that she had been an inmate of the institution, about 10 o'clock in the morning, when a loud rap on the door startled Elsie; the knock at the door was not for her to open it, be-

cause it opened from the outside; but it was more to prepare her for what was to follow. She jumped to her feet and threw the book which she had been reading aside, and as she looked toward the door she expected to see Mrs. Blake, who had but a few moments before gone out, but to her surprise and dismay coolly walked in Roy Wallis.

He was dressed with unusual elegance. A large diamond pin sparkled from his shirt front and upon the middle finger of his left hand he wore a beautiful gem. His form showed to a good advantage in the cut of his clothing, and aside from his devilish heart he would bear the name of a perfect gentleman in appearance.

Poor Elsie turned pale at the sight of this monster; her color then came back to her face until it was crimson. She knew not how at first to control her anger, yet she must use some diplomacy, too, if she would ever gain her freedom. It would not do to express her feelings just then.

She took a few steps backward and placing her hand on the chair which she had just vacated, waited to hear what he had to say, looking him full in the face.

"This is an unfortunate affair, Miss Elsie, that has brought you to this place; but I wanted to speak to you alone—I was forbidden to visit you in your home. You refused my friendship, so I thought maybe if you came to my home you might listen more to my pleading."

"Stop, Roy Wallis, not another word from you; you are a coward and a villain to work on my feelings as

you did, in sending me a decoy telegram, then entrapping me to this house, and making me a prisoner here. What do you intend to gain by this scheme?"

"Be seated, Elsie," said Roy, "and listen to what I have to say; I promise you right here that no harm of any kind shall befall you; it was my maddening love for you that drove me to this, together with the insulting remarks of your friend——"

"Hush, Roy Wallis, don't you dare breathe the name of so good and pure a man as Mr. Pendleton; I will not hear you speak of him without a protest; no purer man or nobler creature ever existed than Harry Pendleton, and you will suffer for this wicked act in separating us; the God of heavens that lives above will watch over us. You may separate us for a time, but His judgment will follow you, and when you are receiving your reward we will be enjoying the blessing of each other's company."

"Oh! you are quite romantic, Elsie; you must remember now you are in my power and according as you act, so shall your treatment be."

"I care not for your threats, Mr. Wallis, not one whit. I am not afraid of you; you are a coward and a contemptible villain."

Elsie was in a rage, she tried to be cool, but her anger got the best of her judgment.

Roy winced under her cutting remarks but kept his temper; he knew it would be foolish in him to show any resentment, for his victim was greatly agitated; he being the aggressor allowed for her language, expected

she would tell him a few plain facts, for when she loved she loved with all her heart and when she hated, she did so with equal power; both her gifts in that line were of full strength and in this hour now brought out all her forces to oppose him.

"I have an offer to make you, Miss Elsie, it is this: You are aware I am rich in this world's goods; I have a beautiful home in the city, horses and carriages and servants, all to make you happy. Give me your love, your confidence, and affection and I in turn will make you my wife. We will travel, go abroad and visit all the foreign cities, spend a year or two in traveling and——"

"Never, never, never, Mr. Wallis, I would die here before I would do such a thing; I do not love you, I hate you, I abhor you, and command you to go from my presence now; leave me at once."

Elsie stamped her little foot upon the floor with much emphasis. Roy sat still with perfect composure; her words seemed to have no effect upon him whatever.

"Couldn't you learn to love me, Elsie, if I treated you kindly?"

"No, simply no. Mr. Wallis."

"Wouldn't you like your freedom from this place?"

"No, not if I have to buy it that way; but my freedom will come to me, Mr. Wallis, I have faith in God to that effect, and all your threats do not frighten me; I am firm in what I say. I never will marry you, and I ask you to cease speaking about it; for though I hate you with all the power that my heart possesses, when

I hear you speak of marriage, one of the most sacred gifts which God ever gave to his beings, my blood runs cold at the thought; my hate for you increases if possible; so leave me, leave me now. I pray you go away."

Roy arose to his feet as if to go. "Well, Elsie, I will call again to-morrow, perhaps you may be in a better mood and your stubborn heart may yield to my wishes; I am confident you will, because you will want your freedom soon"—and bending toward her, though she stepped back a few steps to get away from him as far as possible, he said in a half-whisper, "you will only get it, Elsie, by becoming Mrs. Wallis."

"He opened the door with his latchkey and was gone; when Elsie heard the door click and the bolt go into place she felt relieved, though a prisoner in a cell as it were, yet relieved, for his presence made her shudder, though she was not afraid of him.

Roy had been in conversation with Elsie for more than an hour and was further from her friendship and confidence than ever. He might have known that to a girl of Elsie's nature such an offer would have been spurned. She loved only Harry and all the efforts that Roy might put forth were lost, and added only one degree of hatred to another; but poor, blind, conceited fellow, he could not see it in that way. He thought by having Elsie there, where he could explain his position and wealth to her, and making her promises of a life of ease and elegance, she would yield to his entreaties and give up Harry. Little did he realize what mighty

love she had for Harry. In the the very depths of her soul her love was rooted, and no man could tempt her, much less one of his stamp.

After going from her presence he sought the doctor and related his experience to him. The doctor laughed at his futile efforts in a sort of a "I told you so" way, much to the chagrin and disgust of Roy; however, he said: "Perhaps a little longer imprisonment will make her come to terms, Roy; don't feel discouraged, my boy; I prophesy for you success yet, I haven't seen her since her first evening here when she fainted away and Mrs. Blake called me; then of course I did not have an opportunity to see her only as I gave her remedies to restore her to consciousness; take me in and introduce me," said he. He gave Roy a poke in the side at what he considered a joke, but Roy failed to see where it came in.

Dr. Birch thoroughly understood his friend Wallis, and after talking some nonsense they entered into conversation relative to Elsie, as to the best means possible to force her to marry Roy or try to poison her mind against young Pendleton.

Roy Wallis had circulated among his friends that he was going abroad just a few weeks before the abduction of Elsie, while the extent of his trip was simply to Dr. Birch's private asylum, where he had rooms fitted up purposely for this occasion, having no intention of going abroad, at least until he could gain the permission of Elsie to accompany him as his wife.

So when detectives visited his home he was not found

and the servants and housekeeper were ignorant of his whereabouts; he had hoped it would be but a short time only before Elsie would agree to his proposition, but as she was so set in her mind against him and made such positive declarations of love for Harry, he lost much of his courage; still he had hope.

Elsie sank down in a chair exhausted after her interview with Roy. Her independent spirit and courage kept her up as long as he remained, but the moment he had gone she nearly collapsed from the reaction.

She gave herself over to weeping. His bold manner and impudence filled her heart with fear and evil foreboding. Yet she acted in a fearless manner when talking to him, though really it was forced, for any yielding or weakening on her part would only gratify him and this she was bound not to do, so long as God gave her strength to hold out. She deceived him completely, for he declared to Dr. Birch she was the most positive creature that he had ever met, full of independence and defied him to do his worst.

When Mrs. Blake returned to the room she found Elsie in a flood of tears. In her usual deceitful way she inquired why she was weeping so bitterly.

"Just as if you don't know," said Elsie. "That miserable villain!" jumping to her feet, raising her voice to a high key, "God forgive me, but I hate him!"

"Hush! hush! Miss Oaks, you are foolish to speak in such terms of one who would be kind to you and make you so happy if you would but let him."

Elsie walked across the room to where Mrs. Blake

was sitting and going close to her, pointing her index finger, she said: "I am surprised, Mrs. Blake, that you speak as you do. This is an aslyum, as I understand. Every one here, you have said to me time and time again, is an invalid of some sort, weak-minded, or crazy, if you please; I came here to be treated, you say; if so why does Mr. Wallis wish to marry me? Why does he want a lunatic for his wife? I am surprised that you so far forget yourself as to speak thus. In my judgment you are no better than he; you are in league with him and this Dr. Birch, whom you claim owns this accursed establishment. It is a lie, a vile lie! Dr. Birch as well as yourself are the paid tools of Roy Wallis, and it is his money that has tempted you to act your part in this infamous piece of treachery. You will find you are not dealing with a weak-minded girl, Mrs. Blake, but thank God I have my mind and will keep it despite my imprisonment here; I will keep it that I may live to see justice done and proper punishment meted out to every one who is connected with this affair."

This bitter outburst on Elsie's part rather took Mrs. Blake by surprise. Her face flushed, then it became colorless; she grew nervous and tried to appear unconcerned, but the discomfort and annoyance which these truths, so plainly spoken, caused her were visible in the expression on her countenance. Mrs. Blake's reply to all this was a confusion of words; she realized as before she had said too much, for how would she know Roy Wallis loved her unless she had been told all about

it? Sure enough, Elsie had been an inmate of the asylum but a few days and it would be strange indeed if Roy could fall in love with one who was supposed to be bereft of her reason. She saw how weak any argument on her part would be to refute what Elsie had said, so she turned the conversation the best she could, which proved more than ever to Elsie that from the beginning to the end the whole affair was a deep-laid plot and that for the present she was entirely lost to the world at large, her whereabouts unknown to her lover and home, and when her freedom would come she knew not.

The next morning was a lovely May day; the sun shone in through the brass-barred windows and threw a stream of light across the velvet carpet, and formed a most beautiful picture as it reflected its rays upon the upholstery. Elsie stood looking out of the window over the expanse of country which could be seen for some distance from the side of the building in which she was a prisoner. She could not see a house or building of any kind, not an individual, just the plain country hills lay off in one direction, while a more level tract lay in another. As she watched nature in all her glory on that beautiful spring morning, oh, how she yearned for her liberty! Her heart sank within her as she thought of her dear ones at home, who, no doubt, were anxiously seeking her, but in vain, for certainly this institution was almost unknown to the outside world, and surely they would never hear of it, and if so, would not know that Roy Wallis was in any way

connected with it, and never would suspect she was confined within its walls at any rate. As the sun shone through the trees which formed the shade around the grounds of the dwelling, she pictured to herself beautiful Twin Oaks, on such a lovely morning. How familiar the scenes were to her there. She could measure every foot of ground in her imagination; the trees, the flowers, the winding paths and driveways, everything; could see her broken-hearted mother and father, her weeping cousin Florence, Olive and all; last but not least her dear lover. What would be the end of it all? With these thoughts burning in her mind, tears filled her eyes. She knelt down by the window and bowed her head in silent prayer. So earnest was she in her thoughts that she did not hear the door of the room adjoining open. No knock of warning came this time; it suddenly opened. Roy Wallis was again in her presence. She did not rise from her position, but knelt on in prayer.

This bit of religious expression on the part of Elsie caused him to feel his littleness very much. He tried to walk across the floor so as to attract her attention and finally he spoke to her, when he saw she simply ignored his presence.

"Elsie, have you changed your mind yet, since yesterday?"

The poor girl raised her weeping eyes to his and oh! how Roy pitied her! He almost felt like walking back to the door and flinging it wide open, saying: "You are free."

"No, Mr. Wallis, I have not; I cannot. Please have mercy and spare me further from this terrible suffering."

"I would gladly free you, Elsie, but I love you and you must give your consent to be my wife. Say the word and the bolt on that door will be thrown back in an instant; otherwise, I will keep you a prisoner here until you consent. What is your answer?"

"No, no, no, Mr. Wallis, I love but one; I never can love you; I hate you."

The very intimation of Harry Pendleton's name threw him into a rage. He had been very cool before this visit and the one of the day before, but now he was angry, and he came close to Elsie. She had risen from her kneeling position and was occupying a chair near the window. Leaning over toward her, he said, "Elsie, my mind is made up, I will give you one more chance. I will be here this afternoon and I want a positive answer."

Elsie broke in—"I have given you a——"

"Listen, please, Elsie, I am going away in the morning to be gone at least six months. I am going to Europe and if you wish your freedom, be prepared this afternoon to marry me. I shall be here at 3 o'clock with a minister who will officiate. If you refuse me, you do so at your own peril; I swear you will not leave this house alive unless you do as I request; you will never see the face of your mother, your father, Olive, nor even that cur Harry Pendleton again while I live."

"Stop, Roy Wallis, you have said enough, go now.

This afternoon return and I will give you your answer," she said.

Without a word Roy went from the room and as he approached the doctor, who was waiting for him outside, his face was all smiles. "I guess I'll be victorious," said Roy; "I have driven her to give me an answer this afternoon, and that means she is going to yield."

"What did she say to you Roy?"

"She told me to go and return this afternoon and she would give me my answer."

"Well, I hope for her sake, as well as your own, my boy, she will consent."

Elsie walked the floor in deep meditation, not meditating how to answer him, but upon the whole scene. This confinement, coupled with the anxiety about those she so loved who certainly were in despair as to her safety and whereabouts, told upon her wonderfully. While her beauty was not changed materially, yet there was a sorrowful expression on her countenance and a sadness in her eyes which was plainly visible even to herself, as she stopped in front of a mirror to behold her face.

Presently in came Mrs. Blake with the usual innocent expression on her countenance. She invited Elsie to take a seat as she had something to say to her. As she knew now Elsie was fully aware of the character of the place which she was in and just how she came to be there, she made up her mind not to mince matters any further.

"Miss Oaks, I am just informed by Mr. Wallis that he intends leaving here to-morrow for a tour through Europe, and upon your answer to him this afternoon will depend your freedom from this place. I beseech of you to accept him; he can make you so happy; his great wealth will be at your command and everything he can do will be done for your comfort, if you only will accept him."

"I refuse to discuss this question further with you, Mrs. Blake. You know my sentiments thoroughly upon this subject. I will deal directly with Mr. Wallis. It was useless for him to have you try and persuade me after he just left me; I have a mind of my own and will prove that to your satisfaction and his when the proper time comes."

Mrs. Blake saw she could make no impression, so abruptly ended the interview by leaving the room, and sought Roy to inform him concerning the result.

About the middle of the afternoon Roy came. Elsie was waiting for him. Her determined look gave him no encouragement. Despite her imprisonment, there was color in her cheeks which added to her beauty, and charmed Roy, increasing his anxiety to possess her as his own. With much boldness and force he came directly over to where she was sitting, drew a chair close to her, seated himself with as much assurance and composure as if his presence was desired, and said:

"Now, Miss Elsie, I am ready to know my fate."

Elsie assumed an earnest, dignified look which froze into icy coldness. Her tone of voice suited the expres-

sion of her countenance, and with much firmness she said:

"Roy Wallis, you are heartless, selfish, and cruel; there is no real love in your soul; you are devoid of it; your heart is base. What love you may possess is an unholy one—simply to gratify your own contemptible selfishness. You profess to love me and hope to win my affection. What you have done has driven from my heart every vestige of respect, if I ever had any, for you. I would sooner take a snake, one of the meanest of crawling reptiles, into my heart and affections than you."

"Elsie, how dare you insult me thus?" said Roy, rising to his feet white with rage at her cutting remarks.

"I dare, Mr. Wallis, because I have no fear of you; I dare because your foul treachery to me has made me bold, and rather than marry you I would spend a lifetime shut up in these quarters; it is far preferable. You may threaten me; you cannot change my mind. I would rather die than spend one hour with you as your wife. Now, go from this place, I never want to look into your face again, except it is to see you suffer as you have made me to do."

"Calm yourself, Elsie, you do not know what you say. You bid me go away. If I do you will never see your home again, I swear you shall die in this retreat and your body be buried under yonder willows, and not one of your kinsfolk shall ever be the wiser of it."

"Ah! Mr. Wallis, I have no fear of dying in this place, there is a God who rules over the universe and

He will bring it to pass in His own good time; my liberty is sure, yes, I bid you go and do your worst."

"Very well, Elsie, I will obey in this one thing. I go, but remember when we meet again you will be only too glad to accept my offer. My long absence will give you plenty of time to reflect upon this matter; you will regret this step."

"Go, go from my presence at once."

"Farewell, Miss Elsie, my pretty one, when I come again if you refuse me then, I'll take you by force, I am determined you shall be mine. I have you in my power; yet I would rather you came to me voluntarily than by force. But come you must; you are mine," and he was gone.

The bolt in the door clicked in its place and Elsie was alone once more. This final scene unnerved her again completely; she almost fell into a faint, yet managed to reach the open window, and catch the breeze that blew in on that beautiful May afternoon. This revived her to a certain degree, but left her weak and exhausted to say the least.

When Roy reached his rooms, Mrs. Blake and Dr. Birch were awaiting him to hear the final decision of Elsie. They were not much surprised when they learned what she had said to Roy.

"Perhaps you had better stay a week or two yet before you go," said Dr. Birch.

"No, I have made up my mind to go to-morrow, I told her this so emphatically that I must keep my word. I have but little hope of ever winning her, I assure you,

but I swear if she will not marry me, she never will leave this house until she is carried out for burial. Harry Pendleton will never find his darling, and the family at Twin Oaks will be unacquainted with the story of her death."

After making all arrangements for her care during his absence, supplying them with plenty of money, and gaining their further promise to do his bidding, he left the asylum that evening for Boston in a close carriage, the same one which had conveyed Elsie there about two weeks before. He took a late train for New York and the following morning sailed on an outgoing steamer for Liverpool.

The inhuman wretch had broken up the happiness of two families, separated those who would have been united and made another happy family, isolated himself from his own country, disappointed at his ill luck.

Those at Twin Oaks were in deeper mourning than even the death of Guy had plunged them into.

The Pendletons were cast down and heart-broken. Elsie was a prisoner, guarded as even the worst criminal would have been. Bixby, in shame and remorse, did not tell what he knew of the affair. Oh! the wretchedness that one man's evil heart had brought upon so many, some guilty, others innocent. But behind all these terrible truths there was a Providence whose words we quote, simply to prove that the guilty do not go unpunished, and the innocent are avenged:

"For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again."

CHAPTER XVII.

ANXIETY.

THE mysterious disappearance of Elsie from Twin Oaks left the family in an awful state of anxiety; all the villagers tried to sympathize with them in this terrible affliction which had befallen them. Where could Roy Wallis have taken her? They felt confident now it was he who had spirited her away; it must be in some very secluded spot, unknown to the outside world, some place, perhaps, in the woods, miles and miles from any city, and where there was no travel; maybe in some foreign clime; or ere this she was dead of a broken heart, from excitement, from anxiety over the thought of how her parents and Harry would feel on awakening to the realization that she had been abducted and hidden away.

Poor Mrs. Oaks! Her sorrowing heart added gray hairs to her head rapidly as the days went by and no tidings came from Elsie. Mr. Oaks had now been a number of weeks, with the assistance of detectives, the Pendletons, and friends, searching and advertising for her. While he had obtained many clews to his lost daughter, yet when they were followed up they would end in a fable of some kind.

Olive was quiet, not like her usual self, alarmed at

the boldness and audacity of Roy Wallis, for she knew more about him and his love for her sister than she cared to tell. She was very positive he had done her some injury, for there was a look out of his eyes the night of her party, after the interview with Harry, that foretold some deep revenge in his heart toward both Harry and Elsie; in order to strike Harry, necessarily Elsie must suffer.

Florence Wood had decided now since their late affliction to remain as a permanent resident of Twin Oaks; her aunt and uncle insisted upon her doing so. For her to go away after the loss of Elsie would be too much for Mrs. Oaks to bear. Mr. and Mrs. Wood, her parents, were coming to spend a few weeks with them all. Her father had arranged his business so he could be absent from home for a time, as it was quite impossible under the circumstances for Florence to visit them. All these days were anxious ones for the family. Ever since the sad accident on the 4th of July nearly two years before, their home had been one round of excitement, some of the events had been scenes of pleasure, while sorrow had its share with the balance on the wrong side.

Bixby, too, was anxious. He regretted now his part in the unfortunate affair. If he only dared to go to Oliver Oaks and tell him; tell him all about his daughter's whereabouts. He knew just where Roy had taken her, but he did not have the courage to carry out what his conscience kept constantly pricking him to do. In the letters he had received from Roy, question after

question was asked about how the Winchester inhabitants took the exciting affair. Of course Bixby addressed Roy under an assumed name and kept him thoroughly posted, writing every day for the two weeks which Roy remained at the asylum after Elsie's arrival there.

Alice Ruger was writing to Bixby, too, pitying poor Elsie, and asking him if he had any idea where Roy had taken her; for it was a public matter that she had been abducted by Wallis. How could the poor fellow reply to such letters? He could not without telling barefaced lies, which he did. It was easy for him to lie since he met Roy; though lying one hour he was ready to repent the next. That was because he possessed a conscience which pressed him hard to do right, but he failed to obey it.

Alice said in one of her letters: "When you visited Roy here in Boston, did you have any suspicion of him doing such a thing?" Bixby's answer was, "Never, no never, Mr. Wallis spoke always in the best of terms of Elsie and her family; I am sure he never had such thoughts in his mind at that time; if he did he did not intimate them to me." It grieved Bixby to write a lie to his sweetheart, but he could not tell her the truth unless he compromised himself, and rather than to throw any suspicion upon the purport of his visit to Boston he felt compelled to avert her mind from the subject at once; so he made a positive denial of any knowledge of Roy's intentions. Van came and went frequently since the sad occurrence; he extended to the

family much sympathy and joined in the search for Elsie, as far as time would permit him from his business. This unfortunate affair threw Olive and Van together very often; which, despite the sorrow upon them, brought a feeling of satisfaction to her, for she could have him now all by herself without any comment whatever. The inconsistency of her strange actions was lost sight of because of the anxiety as to the present abode and safety of Elsie. No particular attention was paid to Olive's actions. What at any other time would have been criticised, now was overlooked through the distressing circumstances of the hour, and she watched the opportunities and improved every moment, thus gratifying the desire of her heart, happy within, while wearing an interested and anxious look upon her face. Her nature was deceptive always, so it caused her no difficulty whatever to assume a deep sorrow for the condition of affairs around them; while in the seclusion of her heart her mind was interested upon meeting Van from time to time.

All this was very agreeable to him too. While he was grieved at the performance of Roy and regretted his inability to find Elsie, yet he enjoyed the confidence of Olive and the affection which she so abundantly displayed for him. There was much anxiety, too, upon his part, for the restoring of Elsie to her parents, for this would hasten his union with Olive. They could not marry as long as there was no definite news from her; if she was dead they must find it out first; if alive, they must seek her whereabouts and bring her back.

It is needless to say that Van and Olive were engaged; the reader must know that they had been lovers before she married Guy, and lovers while she was his wife, and lovers still. They felt they had a right now to pledge themselves to each other. Gossip was strong against her. People said that she wanted to be mistress of the new house and couldn't wait until Guy had been dead a respectable length of time. She possessed every quality which goes to make up an attractive and accomplished woman, and of course, he was right in giving her the attention he did; while on the other hand it would have been to her credit if she could have been more reticent, less given to fondness for men, particularly when two such sorrowing events had come upon her and her family in such a short space of time.

Poor Harry Pendleton was more anxious than any of the rest; even her father's and mother's anxiety could not compare with his; theirs was for the loss of a daughter, though blood of their blood and flesh of their flesh; his was for the return of his darling who had been snatched away from him, not by the cruel hand of death—that would have been a thousand times more bearable even cruel as it always is—but by a villainous and cold-hearted plot to seek revenge. So pure a girl as Elsie to be in the power of such a wretch! It made his blood run cold; his loss was greater by far than theirs, the disappointment of anticipated unity between two loving hearts when something intervenes and tears them apart brings with it a sorrow and a deep feeling of

regret, a feeling that the whole world has turned against one; there is no language to describe the suffering of such a separation.

Three weeks had elapsed, it was already June, every sign of summer was at hand, the flowers were out, the earth covered over again with its mantle of green, the foliage in the forest rapidly developing to maturity, and the sweet-scented pines bowed their fragrant branches as the winds blew across the hilltops and wafted o'er the valleys their rich perfume.

Harry Pendleton sat upon the piazza of Twin Oaks alone, and as he gazed toward the hills which lay off to the west he was lost in thought, in deep meditation, for his mind was far away from the scenes of the present, yet centered upon no particular spot, for the whereabouts of his darling was still a mystery.

He had grown thin, his features, formerly so regular, had become wonderfully changed by the weeks of deep suspense and suffering which he had gone through. The perpetual question was "Where is Elsie?" Over and over again in his mind did he form plans to unearth this mystery, but as fast as one thought suggested itself to him, another would supplant it and left him at the end of an hour with no solution as to how he was going to find her. While he sat there thus musing he saw a queer-looking old creature coming up the broad walk which led to the house.

She was a woman perhaps more than fifty, wrinkled and haggard in appearance, just the opposite of those who inhabited the home where he was a guest. Her

clothing was cheap and her face looked as if it was unacquainted with either soap or water.

Harry arose as he saw she intended to come upon the piazza as if to stop her, but she gave no heed to his movements whatever.

"What would you like here, madam?" said he in rather a mild but firm voice.

"Please, sir," said the old vagabond, "I want to tell your fortune."

"No," said Harry, "I don't want my fortune told; besides you don't know anything about my affairs, I am sure, and cannot tell me a thing which is true. I do not believe in you people; you are all fakes."

"Ah! mister, I can see you are in deep trouble."

Harry gave a start at this expression of truth from the lips of the vagrant.

"And I can help you, I know; let me tell your fortune, please," said she, extending her bony hand.

"I can help you," said Harry to himself in an undertone. He had half a notion to let this impostor try her hand at it anyway. The thought flashed through his mind, "maybe she can help me." Just at that moment Mr. and Mrs. Oaks came out on the piazza. They heard Harry talking with some one and they came to see who his companion was, as every voice they heard gave them hope of Elsie; they thought maybe some one had come to tell them good news; but when they saw this unfortunate specimen of humanity standing close to Harry, they started back, not comprehending the meaning at the first glance.

"Stay, Mrs. Oaks," said Harry; "this woman is going to tell my fortune for fifty cents. She says she can tell all about my life, and states that I am in great trouble."

Mr. and Mrs. Oaks looked at each other. Harry laughed at his own remarks, even though it was forced, for there was too much truth in what the old hag said, and now he did not wish her to go, as he was interested, but of course would not admit it to her.

"Very well," said Harry, "you may tell my fortune, but remember I have no faith in you, nor in one word you say."

The old woman made no reply to his remarks, nor took any notice of the presence of Mr. and Mrs. Oaks, but proceeded with her mysterious performance after Harry paid her the fee.

She deliberately took a chair and placed it close by the side of his, taking his hand into her own as she did so. It made him almost recoil with a shudder, for her appearance was anything but inviting.

"Young man," said she in a sort of squeaky voice, "I read in these lines a story of unusual interest. You have a friend, I might say a very dear friend, from whom you are separated." Harry looked frightened almost, as he gazed into the faces of Elsie's father and mother and met their expression of wonderment and interest at these words.

The fortune-teller sat with her eyes cast down, looking at the lines in Harry's hand and could not see the face of her victim or those of Mr. and Mrs. Oaks.

"She is a blonde young woman, far from here now, but she will soon be back again in her home." For some minutes she did not speak or raise her head.

Poor Mrs. Oaks wore an agitated look. While Mr. Oaks did not believe in superstition, yet what could he say when the gypsy told such startling truths? Harry trembled with nervousness, but he was all attention as she again spoke.

"You are not a married man, but you will be before long; I read it in these lines, they promise you yet much happiness, but there is a disappointment here too——"

"Let me ask you a question," said Harry anxiously. The gypsy shook her head, then said rather savagely: "Don't speak, don't speak; you will break the spell. Oh! I see a beautiful young girl far away with a pleading look. She is in sorrow too—she is alone. She is in a beautiful house though, but alone; no, there are others there, I can see them; there is an enemy of yours coming between you both, a large man; there is jealousy here too; you will have trouble, much trouble before peace comes. This enemy of yours is the cause of all your trouble; it will be some months before you have good tidings; you are going to meet with some startling news."

"Enough," said Harry, "I have heard enough," and he drew his hand away from the old gypsy and stood on his feet with the perspiration streaming down his face. He bade her go; she arose to go, but before departing offered to tell Mr. Oaks' fortune, but he would not consent to it; he had heard enough, too, like Harry;

so muttering to herself, she wended her way down the path to the public highway and was soon out of sight."

"Well, well, well," said Harry, "what do you think of her?"

"Why, I think," said Mrs. Oaks, "she is the strangest person I ever saw. How singular! She told you some pretty plain facts, Harry."

"I only hope we shall find poor Elsie soon; if we do, I shall believe in fortune-telling surely, but I never put much confidence in such beings. While they often tell us many striking truths, yet I somehow cannot place any dependence upon their prophecy. There is a sort of mystery connected with these old gypsy women which I have never been able to understand," said Harry.

"I am just about as skeptical in my belief as you."

"Whether she knows anything or not concerning this sad affair, I feel rather better," said Harry, "since the old fanatic paid us this visit, for it has given me a little hope, anyhow, and I was in a pretty sad plight when she came here, for I had been out here trying to strain my imagination to some degree of hope, but was about giving up in despair when she came up the path."

Olive joined them on the piazza, but came too late to witness the strange proceedings. She seemed quite interested when Harry told her what the woman had said.

"Oh, why didn't you call me?" said Olive; "I would have had her tell my fortune too."

"We heard enough," said her father; "I should not

have cared to hear her go over the same ground again, for her story to you would have been similar to that of Harry's, varying a little to suit the circumstances."

"Evidently, papa, you do not believe in her then?"

"No, I do not."

"Do you mamma?" said Olive.

"I cannot say I do, dear, but she spoke some things to Harry, which just at this time seemed to fit our case wonderfully close; whether it happened so by a mere circumstance or not I cannot say."

The family discussed the matter at length, but could not find any way whereby they could deny that the gypsy had touched upon the all-important subject which was uppermost in their minds, while her sayings did not add any relief to them, beyond what Harry seemed to feel at her coming; it, on the other hand, did not make them unhappy.

It set them thinking maybe Elsie was alone and all right somewhere, but where, was the question.

In the meantime poor Bixby was in a state of collapse almost.

He saw how Mr. and Mrs. Oaks suffered by the loss of little Elsie, and within his heart there was some feeling for them, even though he had been wicked and cruel enough to render assistance to Roy in gaining the possession of their daughter. He wanted them to know that she was alive and well, but how to tell them he didn't know without committing himself.

One day while examining the post-office stamp, a thought flashed across his mind that he could write them

a letter, taking the stamp Winchester apart, adding some new letters making it Boston, and dating the letter one day back. It was a bright idea, too, for one so unaccustomed to deviltry as he was, for prior to this affair which he was mixed up with, he had never been identified with anything of the sort; he knew enough, too, to disguise his handwriting, and commenced a letter somewhat in this fashion:

"BOSTON, Mass., June —, 18—.

"OLIVER OAKS, ESQ., Winchester, N. Y.

"DEAR SIR: I read in one of the Boston papers some time since that your daughter was abducted from her home, enticed away in a peculiar manner, and her present whereabouts are unknown to you, or any of her friends. Let me say that I know just where she is; she is in a private residence receiving the best of care and attention, not far from the center of the city, but she is a prisoner, guarded closely. A man by name of Wallis, who is jealous of one Pendleton, who is her promised husband, is the scoundrel who has her imprisoned. Wallis is in Europe and has left instructions with his paid agents to keep her a prisoner until his return, when he expects to marry her.

"I dare not tell you more now, but your daughter is perfectly well; if I told you where she was imprisoned, I would be suspected as the informer and my life would be in jeopardy. I give you this information that you may ease your mind as regards the safety of your daughter.

"I remain your sympathetic friend—

"VANDYKE BROWN.

"P. S.—The signature is assumed as a matter of course. V. B."

After writing the letter he put it in an envelope, sealed it up, and addressed it properly, carefully stamping it as if mailed in Boston the day before; then placed it in the letter-box of the Oaks' family and awaited the result.

Late in the afternoon of the same day, upon the piazza at Twin Oaks, sat Harry Pendleton, Mr. and Mrs. Oaks, Olive, and Florence Wood. They were discussing the old fortune-teller who had earlier in the day told Harry's fortune, when one of Mr. Oaks' hired men came from Winchester with the mail. There were a number of letters for them all—Mr. Oaks receiving at least a half-dozen. He opened first one and then another; as he read them he handed them to his wife; finally the last one lay in his lap with the address upside down. As he picked it up and turned it over he noticed the writing was strange and postmarked, "Boston." He tore it open hastily for he had a presentiment it contained some important news; he read and reread it; his wife noticed a flush go over his face, then the color went from it and he became deathly pale.

Mr. Oaks was a very cool man, not given to excitement nor easily alarmed, but when he read that his daughter was a prisoner and made so by that rascal Wallis, he grew white with rage at the truth.

"What news have you, Oliver?" said she.

"My God, Carolyn, this is awful," said he. At this remark they all gave a sudden start. Olive was the first at his side.

"Oh! papa, what has happened?" said she. Harry,

Florence, and Mrs. Oaks crowded around him. Mr. Oaks simply bowed his head and handed the letter to his wife. Mrs. Oaks was too frightened to read it, but handed it to Harry and requested him to read it aloud, which he did; its contents completely shocked them. Mrs. Oaks and Florence burst into tears, while Olive even was overcome. Harry simply went wild with rage at its contents; he believed every word of it, though it was an anonymous letter.

"The gypsy, the gypsy," said Olive, "told you this morning you would hear startling news. Her words already have come true."

The letter threw them all into a state of excitement and opened unto them a new line of search. "She must be somewhere in or very near Boston," then said Mr. Oaks, "if there is any truth in the letter."

"Yes, and to-morrow I will go," replied Harry, "and renew my efforts to find her; Wallis in Europe! Well, that part I don't believe."

"Nor I," said Mr. Oaks.

After the letter had gone from the post office, Bixby felt relieved, for he knew then their minds would be at rest somewhat, particularly as to the safety of Elsie; for he really believed that they would consider the purport of the letter true, even though it was sent by a stranger. Only a day or two passed when he heard echoes of the letter, for Mr. Oaks told it to Chadwick, and he to others until it became public talk. Who could have written it they could not surmise, but supposed it must be some one who had but little love for

Wallis, and had sympathy for the family, yet was in no position to reveal his identity.

Even though they never learned the real name of the writer they felt thankful to the one who was kind enough to inform them, if only in so vague a manner.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE LOVERS.

ALTHOUGH Guy Hills' grave was covered now by its first green mantle, the marble shaft which marked his memory in the little cemetery near Winchester was still like unto a snowy whiteness. Time as yet had not discolored its freshness. The letters upon the stone which told the story of who lay beneath were very clear; but the brief time that it had been standing there performing its gloomy mission did not deter his widow from activity in securing for herself another mate.

Just a few short months since Guy's death, yet she now was ready to cast her lines with the fortunes of another, and had it not been for the open shame and disgrace it would have brought upon the family, and also if her lover had been willing, she would have married, notwithstanding the short space of time since her late husband's death.

Van had become a regular visitor at Twin Oaks. While he had from the first of his acquaintance been charmed with its people, he now was deeply attached to the place and really was madly in love with Olive. Since she became a widow his hopes had received a new impetus; the right which he formerly did not possess was now his, and thus he encouraged the feelings of

his own heart toward the union which he realized soon it would be theirs to enjoy; yet perhaps not so soon either, for the fact that Olive's widowhood had been but brief, and Elsie's whereabouts were unknown, would act as a barrier, for they had cast a gloom over the family, whether it did individually over Olive or not, and must necessarily check any rapid rush to matrimony. While Van was impatient to possess the object of his love, he must bear the waiting until a time when the death of Guy would be far enough away to warrant no particular criticism from the community at large, and also until Elsie's fate should be ascertained.

Van's visits to Twin Oaks were not alone. Often, by his invitation, Spence King would accompany him. It was Van's hope to bring about a match between Olive's cousin, Florence Wood, and Spence. Of course, she was divorced from her husband, but that didn't make any difference whatever; her record was unimpeachable; her life and associations had been pure; she was religiously connected on her side of the family; and her misfortune in being united with one who had turned out so badly, could not be held against her, but rather, on the contrary, made her the more sought after because of her vivacity, good looks, and high family connections. Hence it was Van's idea to bring about a marriage between these two.

Olive had always been friendly toward Spence. The fact of his being only a clerk had no weight in the matter. He was a clever fellow, popular with every one,

of a good family, good education, could have held a much higher position if he had so desired, but his business ideas and ambitions did not go beyond his present occupation, which seemed to satisfy him. He had always liked Olive, but she being the daughter of a rich man, he always felt rather timid and remained in the background, being only an occasional caller at her home. His father, though he was the owner of the big school at Annandale, was terribly in debt; the expense of running an institution of the kind was considerable. While his income was quite large, yet there was barely enough coming into his hands to meet the outgo. Thus he was always in hot water as to money matters and Spence was compelled to make his own living, which was done willingly and was extremely honorable on his part. It gave him the respect of all as well.

Spence found in Florence Wood a very pleasant companion, and she in turn seemed to admire him, though she was conscious of the fact that his heart was not set on her by any means. He liked Olive the best; had been frank enough to say so; though he admitted he thought considerable of her. She was not in love with him, yet liked him as a friend; thus she was free to talk to him plainly, knowing they would never be anything to each other but friends. Florence did not confide this secret to any one—it remained a matter of privacy between themselves.

Van in the meantime used all his efforts to bring them together as much as possible; he felt sure of his love, so wished to see Spence settled too, and he knew

that Florence would make him a good wife. But she only met Van's praises of Spence quietly, unassumingly, sometimes gave a sweet little laugh, then a word or two in her gentle way, neither denying nor confirming that she loved him, while Spence listened with a pleased flush on his face when her name was mentioned to him; for he did not dare divulge to Van that he loved Olive. Yet Olive realized just where Spence stood in his relation toward her; she was so keen of perception that she quickly found out the secret he was carrying.

As time passed on, the visits of Spence became about as numerous as those of Van at Twin Oaks; the closing up of the store evenings devolved upon the other two clerks; he was always on hand during the day, but the most of the evenings were his to enjoy as he would. He loved to go and see Florence, for then he could see Olive. Florence was fully aware of his feelings, for her widowed cousin, who was the promised wife of Van; she remonstrated with him often about it, but it seemed to have no weight in the matter. Love is so singular—when it comes upon a human heart, it takes possession of it entirely; though it may not be wise to let the truth be known sometimes, yet the smothered feelings are there which sooner or later may break out into an open declaration of affection.

One evening, as Florence and Spence were out walking, their conversation drifted upon the topic which his heart and mind seemed so bent upon. "You must not show your regard for Olive as you did last evening, Spence," said Florence.

"I know I ought not to have been so attentive to her, for the truth of the matter will be revealed if I am not more careful, then I guess I would have to seek a new position, ha, ha, ha."

"True enough, Spence. You see, Van is very much in love with Olive indeed, and has been for nearly two years now. They were lovers before Guy and she married."

"Yes, and have been since, I guess."

"What do you mean, Spence?" said Florence.

He saw that he had said rather more than he intended, so turned the conversation in another direction. He was frightened almost at his own remarks, and turned to see if any one was near them, but they were quite alone. The moon shone brightly and cast her beams of soft light over the surrounding country. Shadows were thrown here and there where the light streamed through the trees, which formed a very pretty picture. There was just breeze enough blowing from off the hilltops to make it exceedingly pleasant. Somehow he wanted to tell somebody his feelings, and as he had become well acquainted with Florence, and knowing, too, she quite understood him, felt free to express himself where otherwise, perhaps, he would not have done so. He had planned this walk, the night being so beautiful, and intended to bring the subject up for discussion as they walked by the wayside. Florence was an attentive listener. While Spence talked to her, he watched her face even in the moonlight, so full of expression and interest in his conversation. He

thought too, in the midst of his praises of Olive, of the charms of his fair companion; for indeed she was a lovely girl. Surely she could be properly termed a girl, for she was young and very girlish in her ways. She married extremely young, her wedded life was but brief, and her residence at Twin Oaks had been a little over a year, so she was still young. Though he admired her as she walked beside him, there was a deeper fascination in his heart for Olive that had been secretly growing for more than a year and the time had come when he must speak to some one of it, and who could he unburden himself to better than unto Florence? She understood the feelings which his heart possessed for her cousin and sympathized with him in the knowledge that while he was in love with Olive he was not in a position to openly announce it. Spence was fully aware of Van's intentions, and for him to even try and step between them at this juncture would be no less than moral suicide for him. He had never given Van any reason to suspect for one moment that he was an ardent admirer of Olive, and he had not the courage now to make known his feelings, so must smother them for the time being; yet he liked to talk about it to Florence; while Van cherished in his mind the idea that these two were lovers and their walks and talks were in behalf of their own interests.

After their return home, Florence went direct to her room, while Spence found his way back to Winchester. She seated herself by an open window and gazed out upon the beautiful scenery. The moon was high in the

heavens, the great dome overhead full of twinkling stars; nature was all so quiet without; not a sound save the barking of a dog in the vicinity or the whistle of a steamboat as it plied up or down the river, which was but a mile or two distant from Twin Oaks. She thought over their conversation and wondered how it would all end. Her cousin's life already had been quite eventful and soon again she would wed, despite the fact that Guy had been dead so short a time. As she sat there looking out at the moonlit landscape, she wondered again and again if Olive really did care anything for Spence more than mere friendship. "Poor fellow," thought she, "I hope he will not make any trouble for Van; for Mr. Chadwick is such a good young man. She held him in high regard and only wished for him and Olive much happiness. She knew it would certainly be hard for Spence to drive out of his mind the fascination that he already had for Olive, yet she was endeavoring to impress upon his mind the foolishness of allowing his affection to take root in a heart that already was seemingly overwhelmed with love for another, because if cultivated, the end would be unhappiness for all, and possibly open disgrace. She foresaw all this in her keen judgment.

Spence went home with slow tread. His mind, too, was upon the conversation of the hour just passed; he could not seem to find a way out of his dilemma. He made up his mind, though, that he was positively in love with Olive and he would learn from her own lips at the first opportunity just how she regarded him.

While all these acts were going on with the lovers at Twin Oaks, the same evening there were two more hearts full of interest for each other in a nearby home. Poor Bixby, conscience-smitten, guilty Bixby, yet he suffered all alone. Even when Alice was beside him, he felt the contemptible sin of foul treachery haunting him; though near the one who had so lately grown into his life, yet never away from remorse. Elsie in prison—he knew where; Alice always wondering where Roy had taken her! She asked Bixby over and over again, and every time he pleaded ignorance, with a bold, defiant look; he wondered, too, to Alice where Roy could have taken her. Alice was at home now for the summer, having completed her first year of school life. Of course she had attended the little district school at "Log Holler," a small, wooden building, where not over a handful of children could be found at any time, say a dozen or so, children of the settlement. The little rural place had a population of perhaps a hundred souls; just a few farmhouses scattered about, a store or two, and a big saw and lumber mill. The chances for an education in a place like that were indeed very limited. Alice had attended the little brown schoolhouse for a number of years, and that was all the schooling she had been able to receive until her people sent her to Boston to the Tremont Seminary for girls, which was only a middle-class school, and she never would have gone there had it not been for Van Courtland Chadwick, the young merchant of Winchester. It was the ambition of her father and mother for

Alice to become the wife of Van. They built their hopes, as we know, upon vain imaginations; but their daughter to them was the light and sunshine of the household, and they could see no reason why she could not grace the new home of Van with dignity, so urged her to go to Boston to complete her education, that Van might be proud of her when the time came for them to marry. This plan was all on their part; even Alice did not join in the scheme, but felt obliged to obey their wishes in a measure.

After Alice met Charley Bixby in Boston, and they commenced to correspond, it awakened in her heart a new life. Touched by the first sentiment of love, she realized that something had come over her—a new experience which her heart was unacquainted with. It brought joy to her, which she was unable to explain, beyond the fact that she was unusually happy. She had known him all her life, just in a friendly way, but now, somehow, he had entered into her life and was a part of her constant thought, and the nearer she was drawn to him the further off was the idea of ever cultivating the friendship of Van. She wrote and told her parents of the affair; they at first bitterly opposed any change in their plans; they had set their heart upon having the new merchant for a son-in-law and so it must be.

"The idea," wrote her mother, "your father says you have no judgment to marry *poor*, when you can marry *rich*, yet your father likes Charley Bixby, for he is Ed Bixby's son; your father used to wait on Ed's sister

Matilda before he met me; she died, poor thing, the night we got married; Matilda was so jealous of me, your father says, yet we don't like the idea of giving up Mr. Chadwick and we know that he likes you; your father says he can tell it by his actions, so give up Bixby and set your heart on the new merchant and you can live as nice as the Oaks', your father says."

Alice paid no attention to the letter received relative to her dismissing from her mind young Bixby and devoting her thoughts to Chadwick. She had sense enough to know that there was a great difference in the circumstances and surroundings of her home and life and his; besides, there was not the feeling and interest in her heart for him that she already possessed for Bixby; so she decided now that she was away from her home she would use her own judgment and follow the dictates of her own conscience. Bixby's letters were full of interest to her and she believed he was a good young man; for how could he be otherwise—brought up by parents who were strict and had watched over their children with care. He had never been away from his home to mingle with the outward world; so consequently her heart felt very warm toward him from the start, and thus it was not a difficult matter for Bixby to make her feel a deep affection for him.

Now that the summer afforded them so many opportunities to be together, they enjoyed many hours in each other's society. Her parents were prepared to relent when she returned from Boston. Her letters all the winter long were favorable only to Bixby, and after

exchanging many epistles about the affair they found it wise to cease pressing her to forget him, and leave her to act as she would, and choose for herself.

Bixby's father allowed him as much time as he could to visit Alice. "Log Holler" was a number of miles from Winchester, and of course, required much time in going to and fro. Yet the young man managed to see his sweetheart often. His heart was full of love for her, but full of unhappiness at the same time on account of his foul treachery to Elsie and Harry. The Oaks family all thought him the soul of honor and worthy of great respect, and never for one moment suspected him of entering into any such deviltry. This of course destroyed his peace of mind to a certain extent, and while he gave Alice his love and affection, he could have enjoyed the sacred blessing and privilege much more if his conscience had been free from the sin which bound him down and held him as in a vise; for he was powerless to undo the wrong, for fear of losing the respect of all, and above all the love which he knew Alice possessed for him.

This very night while Van and Olive were enjoying their love under the light of the pale moon at Twin Oaks, and Spence and Florence were conversing so earnestly and walking about the graveled paths, Bixby and Alice, arm in arm, were sauntering leisurely along the highway which led from "Log Holler" to Slaterville, telling to each other over and over, the old, old story—ever new.

What a crooked path the path of love is! Van fol-

lowed after Olive; Spence was trying to walk in the same pathway with Van—while his companion of the evening, Florence, had once followed in the pathway of one who had made her life miserable. What a crooked path he had led her into! Bixby was leading Alice and he was on the verge of disgrace—his connection with the abduction of Elsie was the beginning of bitter days for him. Love is blind—how true.

CHAPTER XIX.

AN AWFUL JUDGMENT.

THE summer months passed by and no tidings came of Elsie, though her friends kept up the search, following up one clew after another; the letter which Bixby had sent to them early in June gave them some ground to work upon, yet they were unsuccessful.

The house which Roy Wallis owned in Boston was under strict surveillance during all this time. Roy had not returned from abroad as yet, so their watch, too, was in vain. Bixby had kept him informed regularly, as he made up the mails when he was in the office, and as he was there most of the time he could easily drop in his letter to him without his father gaining any knowledge of it. In fact he always addressed him under an assumed name, and Roy's letters to Bixby were all sent to Dr. Birch, and then re-addressed to Winchester, so he never received any mail with a foreign stamp or postmark. Thus it was easily managed without detection; for there was no suspicion.

Roy had left orders how to proceed with Elsie in his absence. In case of her death she was to be buried under the beautiful bending willows within a few yards of the asylum, and the fact was to be kept a secret. If she relented at any time, they were to cable

him and he would return at once to claim her as his bride, thereby giving her the freedom which he knew the poor girl so anxiously awaited.

Month after month went by from the middle of May or thereabouts until October. The foliage had already turned red and brown; upon the ground was scattered the first visible signs of destruction to the beautiful summer—for dead leaves, withered grass, and dying wild flowers were about in abundance, showing how nature had already begun its waste upon the beauties of the season just past. Out of the windows of Elsie's room she could witness all these things; reading and gazing at the works of nature was about all she could do; it was her principal occupation. Her long imprisonment had begun to tell on her looks; while she retained much of her beauty, yet her cheeks lost their rosy hue to some extent, and her form and figure was not quite so plump; otherwise her imprisonment did not seem to affect her outward appearance. She possessed great vitality, lots of ambition and vim; she was bound not to grow despondent and waste away; she must live to return to the arms of her darling lover, and kiss the lips of that fond mother and father, and embrace all her loved ones as of old. Though that contemptible fiend, Roy Wallis, had caged her, she would live, despite his efforts to kill her by this imprisonment, while she vowed never to become his wife.

Those who had her in charge were very kind. She was supplied with every comfort possible, but the joy of freedom or of hearing from her friends or sending them any message.

Mrs. Blake was her constant companion. Scarcely ever did she see Dr. Birch, or any one else in the asylum. The others who were confined there were patients who should be there; some were in a pretty severe state, others convalescing. Yet not an individual ever knew what sort of a patient was confined in the wing of the building where Elsie was. The strictest secrecy was kept in the matter, for fear of the facts being known.

The watchers of course kept Roy fully informed as to Elsie's proceedings; how she battled against the plan of yielding to him, even destroying a letter which he had inclosed to her, when writing to Dr. Birch, again appealing to her to let him return and consent to marry him. Dr. Birch came into her apartments upon receiving the letter and handed it to her, saying: "Miss Oaks, I have a letter here from Mr. Wallis for you." Elsie straightened herself in her chair, and replied with much firmness and dignity:

"I refuse to read any communication from Mr. Wallis; I am not interested in him, only in so far as my freedom goes. I am convinced it contains no such news for me, and rather than to have my feelings wounded any more, I will take it and destroy it before your very eyes; you can write him to that effect, if you please, and tell him to do his worst. I am not afraid of him, neither will I obey his wishes in any respect."

She took the letter unopened, rose from her seat, deliberately struck a match, set fire to it, and held it in

her tiny hand until it was completely consumed in the flames, much to the astonishment of the doctor. He had no thought that she would carry out the threat, yet he watched her proceedings with considerable interest as well as surprise.

"You are the most independent creature, Miss Oaks, I ever knew," said he; "certainly you do not go about this matter with much judgment, or in the right way. It might have contained a message giving you your liberty."

"No! no! no! Dr. Birch, you know better. Roy Wallis is not going to give me my liberty until it is done through the Providence of God. I warn you that as sure as there is a God in the heaven above us, his judgment will fall upon him and you, too. I am satisfied it will come. Do you suppose that He who watches over his people, who notes the falling of the little sparrow to the ground and even knows the very number of the hairs of our head, will let this crime go unpunished? No, no, Dr. Birch, I prophecy his downfall speedily, and every one of you who have been a party to this wretched business will receive your reward."

Elsie stood before her visitor with great dignity. She looked unusually pretty with her golden hair in waves about her shapely head, and such a positive expression on her countenance. Her eyes were aglow with fire; they snapped with vigor and shone with exceeding brightness. He tried to be cool and collected; was even half-minded to give her her freedom there

and then, so agitated was he over her remarks. He trembled with fear, but he had pledged himself to Roy —was under great financial obligations to him, like Bixby. Roy owned him in a measure and it would be suicide for him now to turn back after so many weeks of loyalty, and besides the money, the money he was receiving for his part in the affair! Oh, no, he could not give Elsie her freedom. So about as suddenly as the thought flashed across his mind, so quickly did he dispel it. He sat before her with a half-sarcastic smile upon his lips, and replied to her strain of eloquence in much the same manner.

"So you will cast me, too, into the burning pit, Miss Oaks, along with Mr. Wallis? Ha! ha! ha!"

"Oh, I don't cast you anywhere, Dr. Birch; neither Roy Wallis! God will mete out his punishment in his own good time, whether it will be one thing or another, I know not, 'But vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord.'"

The doctor rose to go; he had heard enough. It only added to his uneasiness, so he ended the interview.

Elsie tried to be patient and wait until assistance would come to her relief. Were it not for the one little word hope, in the vocabulary of our language, many a heart would grow faint in waiting. All through the beautiful summer months never had she set her foot on the ground; but in these rooms—closely guarded—had been kept a prisoner. Though discouraged at the outlook, yet prayer was her main strength in this great trial. Morning, noon, and night she poured out her

heart to God in earnest prayer to give her freedom and bring her back to her dear ones at home.

Elsie had been at Dr. Birch's asylum now nearly five months, when one day as Mrs. Blake had just gone out, a loud rap at her door warned her of some one coming. Presently she heard the key inserted in the lock, the door opened, and in walked Dr. Birch, with a telegram, which he had just received from Roy, stating that he had arrived in New York safely and would be at the asylum the next day. The sudden announcement of his coming meant more trouble for Elsie; still she did not care to show that she felt any anxiety. She simply remarked:

"Oh! he will? Well, I shall refuse to see him, if he comes, and if he makes any attempt to carry out his vile threats, I shall make a scene which will only end to his regret."

"I would use common sense, Miss Oaks, and not plunge myself into still deeper trouble. If you would but agree to his wishes see what happiness would be yours."

"Away with you, Dr. Birch, nonsense! Happiness! What happiness could I ever enjoy with so unprincipled a villain as Roy Wallis? No, a thousand times, no. I would rather die here in these rooms; yes, rather never be permitted to see the face of those I love, than to spend one day with him as his wife; as for you, I command you to go from my presence," and she stamped her little foot on the floor with much firmness in her excitement.

"Oh, ho, Miss Oaks, do not grow so excited, I——"

"Go! go!" said Elsie, "I will not listen to another word." She walked away to the opposite end of the room, stood before the window and gazed out at nature which looked so peaceful under the mild October skies.

Dr. Birch remained seated a moment or two, then without a word arose and left the room. Later in the day he received another message calling him to Boston to meet Roy at his home and spend the night with him, that they might talk over his future plans and also have him give a verbal report of all the proceedings during his absence abroad.

After receiving the word, Dr. Birch made haste to reach Roy's home. Their meeting was extremely cordial. After the meal they withdrew to a private room to converse unmolested. No one knew of Roy's home-coming. The watch on the house had been withdrawn some time previous, so he entered without the knowledge of any one particularly. Fortune favored him, too, as it was in the early evening and darkness had already covered the earth. He had been gone so many months that the excitement of his first disappearance had become a matter of history only.

They sat up late and talked over their punch and cigars, mapping out plans how to proceed the next few days. Although Roy knew pretty much how Elsie had acted, he wished to hear it all over again verbally. Her stubbornness he was fully aware of, or rather her determination not to accede to his proposition; yet he felt quite sure she would yield after this long imprison-

ment, and the further threats which he intended to make to her if she was still decided to refuse him on the morrow, when he would pay her a visit.

It was long past midnight when Roy escorted Dr. Birch to his room. The excitement of the day, the evening, the work and worry upon his mind, the quantity of punch which he had drank with Roy, made him sleepy and no sooner had he retired than he was in a profound slumber, and dreaming how he would laugh at poor Elsie, when she should yield to Roy and marry him, and when her lover, Harry Pendleton, would be helpless to claim the little blonde for his wife.

It was an hour or two later when Roy retired and his sleep, too, was heavy. The liquor which he had drunk stupefied him. His mind was upset with the anxiety of the hour—his trip abroad, his home-coming, the excitement of the anticipation of the dawn soon to break, when he hoped the little beauty would be his, by her own will, if not, then by force—for she must be his.

Roy had been sleeping perhaps for an hour or two when, as if awakened from an awful nightmare, he could scarcely get his breath. He felt a sort of choking sensation; when he suddenly came to the fearful realization the room was full of smoke. He jumped from his bed and groped around in the darkness. The thick black smoke stifled him. He finally succeeded in jerking open the door of his room which led into the hall, and the sight which met his gaze was awful! A lurid flame shot up the stairways, and the cry of "Fire! fire!" rang through the house from some one or more of

the servants, who were also awakened to the terrible fact that the house was burning up over their very heads.

Roy's first thought on opening his door was of Dr. Birch, whose room was in the opposite end of the hall, close to the flames. He called loudly' "Fire! fire! But the smoke, entering into his lungs with every gasp of breath, soon choked his power of speech. Pressing his way along the side of the hall close to the floor, toward Dr. Birch's room, where he could not hear a sound, except the crackling of the flames and the roar of the awful fire, he tried to call again; but overcome by the thickening smoke and heat, and the sight of the flames in the farther end of the hall, he stumbled and fell and lay unconscious upon the floor. All this, perhaps, took no more than one moment of time.

The policeman on the post saw the danger, even perhaps before Roy was awakened by the smoke in his room, and turned in an alarm which the fire department responded to with their usual promptness. The firemen reached the burning building about the time Roy fell to the floor. They lost no time in sending great streams of water upon the house and in entering it to arouse any who might be asleep or in danger of their lives. By this time the servants were all awake, and fleeing to a place of safety. Their sleeping quarters were in the wing of the building adjoining the main house. The fire apparently started from the lower floor in some mysterious way, either through carelessness, or by an unavoidable accident.

The firemen soon learned of the presence in the house of the owner and his friend Dr. Birch. They hastily sought them out amid the smoke and flames. In running through the hall they stumbled over the prostrate form of some one who lay just at the head of the stairs to the right, and nearly in front of the room occupied by Dr. Birch. The firemen lifted the lifeless body and carried it outside, where it was instantly recognized as Dr. Birch. Like Roy he was awakened by the smoke stifling him almost. He jumped from his bed, and in vain searched about for a way of escape. Finding the door he rushed out into the hallway, only to be met by a greater volume of smoke, and even the breath of the flames which were shooting up the stairway. He fell in a heap and lay there until picked up by the firemen. He was entirely unconscious. The smoke had filled his lungs and throat and rendered him helpless. Although he had lain there but a very few moments, in that time he had received fatal injuries. The hot, suffocating air had burned him inwardly; while the hair was burned off his head. They carried him carefully to a house adjoining Roy's and summoned medical aid, but could render him no assistance whatever, for in about half an hour afterward he died without regaining consciousness.

In their further search they found Roy, but in a dreadful condition, helpless and unconscious. He was fearfully burned about the head, but apparently not injured inwardly, like Dr. Birch. They carried him to a place of safety; the physicians pronounced his case

serious, but not hopeless, though it was feared his eyesight was injured permanently. All this was going on while other firemen were trying to gain control of the fire, and save the building from a total loss. They succeeded after awhile; not, however, until it had completely gutted that portion of the house where Dr. Birch had slept.

The fire occurring at such an early hour, it was not mentioned in the morning papers, so the Pendletons were not aware of it, as they would have been had it occurred a few hours before. As a fire in a city like Boston is no uncommon thing, it naturally created no particular excitement or interest beyond those who were connected with the disaster, or who were in sight of the scene of the conflagration.

After two or three hours Roy returned to consciousness. His first question was about the safety of his friend. The physicians did not tell him the worst at first; his own condition was pretty serious; indeed, the burns were very painful. Both eyes were burned so badly that the sight was gone—he was totally blind. When he realized his awful condition and felt too, that he might die at any moment, almost, though the doctors assured him now he would live, he called one of them to him, and in a faint whisper said:

"For God's sake send for Harry Pendleton," giving the physician his street number. They made haste to comply with his request, despatching a messenger, who found Harry eating his breakfast. He was naturally startled by an announcement that he was wanted yes-

haste at the Craig Hospital, some one was dying and wished to see him. The messenger did not know the name of the party who wanted him; only said it was a man who was burned in a fire early that morning.

Harry hastened to the hospital and was ushered into the presence of his old friend; we might say old friend, for he had been so termed once. As he came to the bedside and saw there this pitiable object of humanity, not yet knowing who it was, he shrank back in terror almost at the sight. Bandaged and plastered, hair and mustache gone, eyes covered, he did not recognize the patient. The doctor leaned over Roy, who was moaning and suffering excruciating pain, tossing about on his bed.

"Mr. Wallis," said he, "Mr. Pendleton is here."

The name of Wallis sent a thrill through the frame of Harry. He was shocked at the picture he saw before him. Roy Wallis in this condition? It could not be! What could it mean? Where did he come from? What fire had he been in to get so terribly burned? All this flashed through his mind in a moment. Harry moved to the bedside. Roy, turning his face upward, tried to find his hand, feeling around to grasp it. As Harry gave it to him for his awful affliction made his heart tender toward him, in an instant Roy said in a low voice: "Oh, God, give me strength." Then making a little extra effort, he said: "Harry, how I have wronged you, and this is my punishment! I am unable now to talk much. As I pray God to have mercy upon me, I hope you may forgive—forgive—me.

Poor little Elsie is a prisoner in Dr. Birch's asylum —go to Willett's livery and they will drive you out there. Release her and take her home. Oh, God! how I suffer! Oh! oh!"

Suddenly he went into a dead faint. The doctors reached the bedside and immediately gave him restoratives. When he came out of his fainting spell he was too weak to talk further. By advice of the physician, Harry departed with the promise to call again.

He was exceedingly anxious to find Elsie, enfold her in his arms, impress upon her lips fond kisses, and give her freedom.

This most extraordinary and shocking sight quite unnerved Harry. While he had stored up in his heart for Roy Wallis the most bitter feelings that could be retained, yet when he came face to face with him in this awful condition all his anger was swept away and he realized in an instant that his punishment had come from a higher power, and it would be a sin for him now to still hold hatred in his heart. God had laid His hand upon him and that was enough. He traveled to the livery of one Willett, and told them the awful news and what instructions Roy had given him. They hitched a horse as soon as possible to a light wagon and Harry was driven at a rapid rate to the asylum. The driver who took him over had heard all about the fire; in fact witnessed a part of it; he knew, too, of the death of Dr. Birch.

They reached the asylum after a drive of little more than an hour. Some of the employees of the place were

on the lookout for Dr. Birch and Roy, as they were expected about the same hour or perhaps a little later, and when one of them saw a stranger alight from the buggy and rush up to the front door of the building as if in great haste, he felt something was wrong, for he recognized the rig as being from Willett's livery; it had been there often before. He went to meet Harry; it was the same man who had assisted Elsie to the house from the coach the night of her arrival there.

"What can I do for you?" said he to Harry.

"I am, sir, on a twofold misson: first to inform you that Roy Wallis, the owner of this establishment, met with a very serious accident last night, or rather very early this morning, in the burning of his home in Boston, and next that Dr. Birch was burned to death."

"My God! man, you horrify me! Can this be true?"

"Calm yourself, sir," said Harry; "'tis all true and more. I am Harry Pendleton. I came here by request of Mr. Wallis to give Miss Elsie Oaks her freedom."

Before the man could reply to him the driver of the conveyance which brought Harry there came up to where they were standing and Harry, turning partly around, said: "This man witnessed the fire and he will verify my statement—every word." Appealingly the man looked to the driver, as if to say, "Is this all true?"

"Yes, Mr. Stokes, it was the most terrible affair I ever witnessed. Dr. Birch is dead and poor Wallis is almost dead—lost the sight of both his eyes."

"This is awful, awful," said Mr. Stokes, leading the y to the house. Harry followed him through the

hall, up the stairs, over the very same route which Elsie had traversed so many months before. As he entered the private hall off which were the apartments of Elsie, he gave a loud rap on the door. Mrs. Blake was inside. On opening the door she expected to see Dr. Birch with Roy standing there. Imagine her surprise when she saw the manager of the asylum, Mr. Stokes, with a stranger. He beckoned to her to come out; his face was ashy white; he could hardly control his feelings. Mrs. Blake saw his agitation but was unable to comprehend its meaning. Harry, of course, was unknown to her; he stepped slightly back, and gave the two a chance to speak, but Mr. Stokes simply said: "Is Miss Oaks ready to receive company?"

"Yes, sir," said Mrs. Blake.

"Then let this gentleman pass in; he will not need an introduction, and you stay here and I will explain all to you."

She, obeying his order, pushed the door ajar and motioned Harry to walk in, and then pulled the door shut.

"My God! Mrs. Blake, I have awful news for you. There was a terrible fire last night at Roy's home in town. Dr. Birch is dead, and Roy was fearfully burned about the head, and is totally blind."

"Oh, Mr. Stokes, this is *horrible!* Can it be true?"

"Yes, yes, too true," said he, "the driver from Willett's is here who saw the fire, and told me all about it; and at Roy's request he brought up Harry Pendleton, the gentleman who just passed in that room."

"Oh, mercy, mercy, what will we do?" She wrung

her hands in perfect agony, and walked up and down the hall. She was shocked at the sudden calamity which had so unexpectedly come upon them. She was a strong woman and used to excitement, or Mr. Stokes never would have told her the truth all at once, but he thought she ought to know the facts immediately.

The news flew through the asylum swiftly. Among the employees it brought great consternation and sorrow. They, of course, did not realize the relationship of the Oaks' affair so much as the death of their employer, Dr. Birch. Roy Wallis was almost unknown to them, yet they knew he was the owner of the institution.

Poor little Elsie was sitting with her back to the door when Harry entered. Of course she thought it was Roy Wallis and did not raise her head, as she was engaged in reading a book of poems; Harry stepped up quickly behind her, almost within touch, and as he advanced she turned in her chair slightly to get a view of her visitor. A thrill of joy ran through her frame when she saw standing within a foot of her—her lover. Jumping to her feet she exclaimed, "My darling!" and fell into the arms which were held out for her.

"My darling," said Harry, kissing her fondly over and over again, and pressing her closely to his heart, "My long-lost darling." Elsie could not speak, the joy was too great. She nestled her little blonde head close to him and wept tears of real joy. For some moments Harry stood and held her in his arms. Then she said softly:

"My prayers are answered."

"And mine too, darling," replied he.

He then released her, and drawing a chair beside hers told the story which brought him so unexpectedly to her. She, too, was horrified at the awful judgment which God had sent upon both Roy and his friend, Dr. Birch. She pitied him in his misery and suffering, though he deserved punishment for the anguish he had caused to others.

The sudden and unexpected presence of Harry nearly overcame her; what kept her from going into a faint she never knew, unless his coming acted upon her feelings in an opposite manner from that of other previous exciting scenes which she had passed through since her incarceration there.

Roy's handsome carriage and team was ready in a short time, and Elsie and Harry were driven to Boston. They caught the 1 o'clock train for Winchester, and after apparently a short and pleasant journey, for their presence was such joy to each other that the five hours seemed much less time, they reached their own town, or rather Elsie's native town. They had sent no word of their coming purposely. Consequently the surprise was all the greater—no one knew what had happened within the past twenty-four hours that had brought these two lovers together. Torn apart unexpectedly, they were reunited in the same way.

When the train arrived at the station it was about dark. They took a coach for Twin Oaks and thus reached home without being seen by any of the vil-

lagers. Of course those around the depot recognized them both, as well as the driver of the coach; so the news traveled fast that Elsie Oaks was home, much to the joy of every one. The coach rolled up the driveway at Twin Oaks and stopped in front of the porch, where so often Elsie had watched others alight in days gone by. Her mother was in one of the front rooms off the piazza. She had been watching the twilight fade away into darkness and still occupied her seat, while near her sat Mr. Oaks in silence. Florence and Olive just came into the room as they heard the coach stop. Both started for the door to answer the bell, which rang loudly. Imagine their unbounded surprise and exceeding great joy when before them stood the long-lost daughter of the household and her lover.

"Oh! Elsie," shouted Florence, "dear, dear, dear cousin!" she could not say more, for Olive, too, shouted and threw her arms around Elsie's neck and both of them burst into tears, wild with joy at seeing each other. Harry, too, received his share of the greeting.

The unusual commotion brought out Mr. and Mrs. Oaks, not knowing who it was in the hall making so much fuss; they came out of the parlor, where the lights were not yet turned up, into the hallway so bright, and could hardly believe what their eyes saw. Elsie, releasing herself from the embrace of her sister, flew into her mother's arms and with a wild, passionate joy kissed her and kissed her again. Poor Mrs. Oaks was almost overcome by this sudden happiness. Her joy was so great she cried as if her heart would break, but her

tears soon ceased to flow as she watched Elsie affectionately greet her dear father. Mr. Oaks, strong man that he was, wept as his daughter embraced him. After they had all assembled in the parlor, Harry gave a full account of the exciting scenes of the day, which they all listened to with breathless emotion. When they learned the truth of the whole affair they were all deeply affected at the punishment that Roy Wallis had had sent upon him.

No language can express the feelings of thankfulness which possessed the hearts of the residents of Twin Oaks. That night every member of the household, servants and all, crowded around little Elsie and listened to the tale of her sufferings during her imprisonment; suffering not from the want of the necessities of life, but from the fact of being shut out and away from those she loved, and being compelled to listen to the threats of the villain who abducted her. But by the providence of God, she was restored to her loved ones, and just punishment was meted out to theguilty.

In the hospital ward lay Roy, suffering intense pain, never again to see the light of day. His comrade in crime was dead—burned almost beyond recognition. Thus the dream of their success of that day was never realized; their plans were interfered with, the hand of Providence was lifted against them. "Remember, therefore, from whence thou art fallen and repent, and do the first works, or else I will come unto thee quickly and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent."

CHAPTER XX.

AT THE HOSPITAL.

THE days which followed the return of the lost one were remarkable indeed, so many called to see Elsie and to congratulate the family. Everybody in Winchester was happy except one, and even he was in so far as the fact of Elsie's return home was concerned, though unhappy because of his connection with her disappearance, or rather, her abduction. However, he called, too, to share with them all in their joy. Poor Bixby felt guilty enough, wretchedly so, when he took the little heroine by the hand and bade her welcome home again. She thanked him in her sweet innocence, which made him feel all the more unhappy inwardly. He had cause for alarm when he read later a full account of the fire, which so crippled Roy, and burned to death Dr. Birch. Every day, in some way, he expected to have revealed by someone, somehow, his connection with the affair, and on account of such harassing thoughts he was kept in perfect misery the most of the time. His punishment was not made public, yet he suffered all but the shame that would have followed the exposure.

Among those who called at Twin Oaks within the next day or two after Elsie's return were the Sargents,

They had been there many times during her absence to sympathize and comfort her parents. Mr. Sargent was always ready to give words of cheer despite the nature of the sorrow; no affliction that had ever come his way in life had made him to give up; he always trusted in a higher power for the punishment of every wrong and the reward of every virtue, and in the day of prosperity was hopeful, but when adversity came he was submissive. He took Elsie by the hand in his cool, deliberate way and said:

"I welcome you home, my dear. Your absence gave us sorrow, but never did we once think that you would not come back. Mrs. Sargent and myself always petitioned for you in our prayers. God has been good; He has always been a prayer hearing and a prayer answering God to us; we felt confident you would return. There are two verses of Scripture I wish to quote; always bear them in mind when trouble comes to you. 'If ye shall ask anything in my name I will do it.' 'If ye love me keep my commandments.' Upon these two verses we built our hopes of meeting you soon. We always keep His commandments, and therefore have a right to the answer to our petition. Only a night or two before you came, we prayed long and earnestly in your behalf. We had just returned from your home where your continued absence was severely telling on your parents; we felt the burden upon us and to-night we rejoice with you all; not failing too, to note God's punishment of those who were instrumental in stealing you away. It is impossible

"Your expression of
characteristic of your n
all you say, and join hea
often I have thought of y
imprisonment I could see
ways to me was a beam c
of glory around, bringing
when in my loneliness thin
much comfort."

"Yes," interrupted Mrs. C
has helped us over the roug
within a week he felt you w
but a day or two ago, and lo,

We go back now to Craig l
the scenes there. Poor Roy
No matter how wicked the hu
when it is overtaken by the w
the land and brought low, tl
always aroused to a degree o
We find him truly :-
com-

and open his heart to every good word and work, if God would only spare his unprofitable life.

Three days had gone by before he learned of the real fate of his friend, Dr. Birch. He was amazed at the truth when it was told him, but it only added to his earnestness to repent of his sins, before an even worse judgment would come upon him.

Harry called on him after his return from Twin Oaks, according to promise. Though his condition was somewhat improved from the first morning after the fire, he was yet far from being even comfortable. The burns upon his face and neck which gave him such acute pain at first, were less painful; remedies which the physicians constantly applied relieved the intensity of his suffering, and he could converse, though it was not an easy matter. But he was anxious to unburden his heart and mind to Harry, and so requested him to draw a chair close by the side of his cot, where they could speak in a low tone. They talked in almost a whisper, so as not to cause him any extra effort. Roy went over the whole ground of his acquaintance with Elsie, informing Harry just how his heart felt toward him, what ambitions and hopes he had, what further vengeance he anticipated taking upon him, when, in the very midst of his plans, God Almighty interfered with a swift judgment, changing his revenge into repentance. Not one word did he say in complaint of his present lot. His eyesight was gone, and it would be a long time before he could be around again. His face, too, would always be scarred from the

dreadful burns. He made a clean breast of the facts, asking Harry's full pardon. Of course Harry could not do other than grant it; it would have been wrong if he had refused, for Roy was truly sincere in his repentance, and when God can forgive a truly penitent heart no matter what the sins may have been, why man surely ought to forgive.

We realize it is not an easy matter for one who had been so terribly wronged as Harry to forgive quickly, but the condition of Roy and the circumstances which brought him into this condition had much to do with his softened feeling. Harry was so happy to get Elsie back that if he could now render any happiness to one so terribly afflicted as Roy, he felt he must do so. It was an embarrassing position for both of them, but when Harry looked into those sightless eyes and his disfigured face, it helped him over the difficulty, he lost sight of the face of an enemy and saw there now a countenance bereft of hatred by the awful ordeal which God called him to pass through, in order to bring him to a consciousness of his sins.

Their conversation was brief, yet long enough for the purpose. The patient was extremely weak, the confession which he made left him in an even more feeble condition.

When Harry arose to go, he took Roy's hand in his. The poor fellow turned his face upward as if to look into his eyes—seeming to implore his forgiveness—touching the heart of Harry afresh. He said: "I extend to you, Roy, my sympathy in your most unfortunate con-

dition. We will let bygones be bygones. I promise you I will forget my own suffering of the past as far as it is possible—at least I will not hold a spark of enmity toward you; my hatred is lost in the calamity which has befallen you. I forgive you all."

"God bless you, God bless you, Harry," said Roy.

The poor unfortunate was about exhausted and without further conversation Harry withdrew, leaving Roy to meditate upon his lot, yet in a better frame of mind since he was assured that Harry had forgiven him.

CHAPTER XXI.

WEDDING BELLS.

GUY HILLS had been dead now just one year, and Olive had lain aside all traces of mourning and assumed the habiliments of one who, judging from appearance, had never experienced the loss of a dear friend, much less of a husband. She wore gay costumes, and treaded society's pathway as far as was her privilege in a country town like Winchester, with a light heart, which one of her nature could so easily do. Her fondness for excitement was the prime cause of her rush to lay aside the widow's weeds, and assume her usual dress; then, too; her want of love for the departed helped her to forget his memory.

Van, of course, was anxious to claim Olive as his own, just as soon as a respectable length of time had elapsed after the death of Guy—one year was long enough, too, he thought any longer than that time was a mere matter of taste or opinion according to the feelings of the individual who had lost the partner, or the interest one had in the affair. As Olive favored an early marriage, why, he naturally fell in with her idea, which was only acting out his own feelings, for he longed for the day when she would be mistress of his new house, which as yet had not been opened since the

party, more than a year before, with the exception of the suite of rooms which he occupied and was kept in order by the wife of the man who lived in a cottage on his grounds and who had charge of the place; otherwise the house had been closed.

It had been Van's intention to hire a housekeeper, but he had postponed it from one cause and another; then came the sudden death of Guy which gave him hope of realizing his fondest dreams at no distant day.

After the return of Elsie they made plans for their wedding and decided to have it quietly about the holidays. This arrangement they made known to Elsie and Harry and urged them to join in the affair and have a double wedding. It seemed quite out of the question at first to Elsie; her superstition still clung to her; but her experience of the past led her to believe, on after thought, that it would not be wise to delay her marriage, though she did not anticipate any repetition of her former trouble; so after much thought and persuasion from all she agreed to their proposition to have a double wedding despite the superstitious people who never favored such unions, and so Christmas eve was set for the time.

While there was not that great excitement about Twin Oaks in preparing for the weddings as there had been for Olive's former marriage, a little more than two years before, yet it caused much bustle and work, in order to complete the arrangements. The sickness and death of Guy, the home-coming of Olive, her widowhood days, and then the abduction of Elsie, all had

cast a gloom upon their home, so that Mr. and Mrs. Oaks were less in the spirit of having any great display than before, and requested their daughters to have a quiet affair, yet at the same time to go as far as custom or rule demanded.

The weeks flew by rapidly preceding the wedding. Harry spent much of his time at Twin Oaks along with Van. Spence King, too, found occasion often to bring himself hither. Of course he had to give his attention to Florence to shield his purpose in coming. Calling on her was the ruse he worked to get into the society of Olive. While Florence was conscious of the fact that he was deeply in love with her cousin, she did not realize his meaning fully, and only allowed him to pay her such marked attention to partly repair the loss which she knew he felt in the knowledge that he could never gain Olive as his own; he was always so agreeable and courteous, she did not suppose that his constant calling was simply to be near her pretty cousin—and for that only.

Olive saw that Spence was very much interested in her. She gave him no open encouragement whatever, beyond treating him in the most friendly manner; yet he might have mistaken some of her shy glances for expressions of love, coupled with her friendship for him, though she did not mean it in that way, for she was in love with Van and her present feelings were all bent upon becoming Van's wife at an early day.

After much consultation it was decided to have a church wedding. The little white wooden structure

in Winchester was selected for the affair. It stood back from the main street, surrounded by a green lawn in summer, which at this time of the year looked dead enough. It was a pretty church, though plain, but like most country churches it had a sort of a cheer about it even in winter.

The weddings were neither public nor strictly private. A few of the young ladies' most intimate friends received cards of admission, while the general public were excluded. No such rabble as attended Olive's lawn party, a year and a half before, nor even such a crowd as attended her wedding to Guy, was to be seen there. The decorations were principally of evergreens with a few flowers from the hothouses at Twin Oaks. The combination of the prettily painted work of the perfect interior together with these decorations made it a perfect picture to behold.

The old pastor of the church, who had been there a lifetime, who had christened both Olive and Elsie, who knew Mr. and Mrs. Oaks even before they were married, who had performed many a wedding ceremony and preached the funeral sermon for many of his flock from the little wooden pulpit, who had married Olive to Guy Hills, and who likewise spoke the last words over Guy's remains so short a time ago, again stood before the altar rail with the same solemn expression and deep voice, reading the lines which bound these two couples to each other for life. The scene was one of solemnity and they all seemed to realize it. The circumstances were unusual; of course, they were happy,

and very happy too. Elsie, poor little Elsie, who had passed through such an experience, possessed such a devoted heart and the warmest love for Harry, and who on this occasion was united to the one she so loved, was indeed happiness personified. Harry was proud to stand by the side of so sweet a girl as Elsie, and replied to the words of the minister which made him her husband with ardor. Olive looked beautiful as she stood beside her husband; a stranger could not have told but that this was her first love, her first wedding. She looked supremely happy. Her cheeks were fresh and rosy, which enhanced her beauty. Van's expression was full of earnestness and sincerity, though one could find in that expression beaming joy, for his patience had been rewarded.

Harry and Elsie went abroad for an extended tour. Their long separation from May to October, and under such peculiar circumstances, had somewhat affected their health, then the preparation for the wedding brought its cares and anxieties, thus they accepted the advice of friends and sought a climate over the seas, where they might find pleasure in sightseeing and restoration to health as well.

Van and Olive were absent from Winchester but a brief period. His business would not permit him to be away for any length of time. Then, too, they were both anxious to get in the new house, and settle down to a life fraught with happiness and love.

How little do we know the future. We often build castles in the air, and they are dashed to the earth,

figuratively speaking, even before their completion, while the unseen hand erects others in their place, far more fitted to our enjoyment, equipped with every convenience to add to the comfort of our life, upholstered, decorated, and furnished after God's own idea. Van prayed that Olive might be his; he was persistent in the matter; his prayers were answered; the castles which so many times he built and so many times were lowered to the earth, were finally erected to his liking; his wish was gratified.

The unseen hand which rules our destiny is not always the hand of God; that depends upon the motive of the heart. Van coveted the prize which Guy had won two years or more before. Death came suddenly to Guy, while in his early manhood, full of life and vigor. Though Van was innocent as to the cause of that death, yet it had to occur that his wish might be gratified.

If the dead could rise from the grave and give a warning, the spirit of Guy Hills would have pointed its long, bony, unseen finger at Van Courtland Chadwick, and said thereby—though not in words—but in the deathlike silence as from the tomb—"Beware! Beware!"

CHAPTER XXII.

THE "LOG HOLLER" WEDDING.

ONE year of college life was enough for Alice Ruger; its confinement and preciseness were not in uniformity with her disposition. She had been allowed to go and come as she pleased, or nearly so, in the home of her father in "Log Holler."

The schools of Boston were all right for those who had æsthetic tastes, but for one of her plain stamp she found no pleasure in the culture of books. Then, too, her heart had been touched by love, she never really knew what the feeling of love was, beyond natural affection for her parents, until she met Bixby when on his visit to Boston. It had awakened in her heart new thoughts—she took a different view of life.

For a short while previous to her going to Boston her parents were struggling with the idea that she must be fitted for the wife of the country merchant; but as Van's love was already another's unknown to them, and his nature would naturally turn to one of another type of character than their daughter, he gave her no encouragement, which even her inexperienced heart could feel. He could treat her only as politeness or business diplomacy demanded, and that was not sufficient to awaken a love which had never been arcused from its natural slumber.

It took a little longer time for her parents to become conscious of this fact, than it did herself, and it was a great disappointment to them that their plan could never be consummated. They hesitatingly gave up their idea and allowed Alice to follow the promptings of her own heart. Under the circumstances they agreed with their daughter that it would be useless for her to return to school the second year, but had better use the money which it would cost to prepare her wedding outfit.

The winter had passed following the double wedding of the Oaks' Twins, at the little Presbyterian church in Winchester, and spring again had come according to the promise of nature; the landscape looked just as beautiful now as one year ago when little Elsie was abducted from her home.

The country in the vicinity of "Log Holler" was wild. It was situated almost within a stone's throw, figuratively speaking, of the mountains, or high hills which resembled a regular chain of mountains.

They were covered with pines and hemlocks so common for miles around, even reaching as far as Winchester. The inhabitants of this rural district were the plainest kind of people, and obtained their living chiefly by cultivating the soil, though much of it was rough and afforded them no little difficulty to gather their crops.

The nearest village of any size was Slaterville; it was there the Rugers attended church. Alice sang in the choir and otherwise was prominent in church work;

for miles around she was known, and the fact of her spending a year at school away off in Boston gave her much prominence throughout that region of country.

She was the only individual who had been accorded so high a privilege from that vicinity, and when it was known that Alice Ruger was to marry Charley Bixby, the postmaster's son of Winchester, the rough but loyal-hearted citizens were ready to unite their blessings on their union, and give them a welcome as only such characters as those of "Log Holler" could do.

Early in June the time was set for the wedding. Bixby had completed his arrangements and Alice had finished her preparations. Her dresses were pretty though inexpensive. As the home of the Rugers was plain and not large in its proportions and all the neighbors wanted to see Alice married, they decided to go to the Slaterville church. "It would be more appropriate anyhow," said Mrs. Ruger; "Alice has sung in the choir so long she ought to be married in the church; besides Mr. Ruger and I were married there more than twenty years ago."

So to the little crude meeting house they went one evening in June. It was filled to overflowing with neighbors about "Log Holler" and Slaterville. There were no cards issued for the affair, but the hour of the wedding was just given out in a general way; anybody and everybody could come. After the ceremony was over all crowded around to wish the young couple success in life.

It was joyous despite the lack of formality and ex-

pensive arrangements; a carriage from Winchester bore them away to take a train to spend their honeymoon with relatives.

Bixby was unable to stay from Winchester any length of time, owing to his position in the post office, and lately he had added to his duties those of the telegraph office; the two together afforded him sufficient income to live upon in an economical way.

About a month before the wedding, Bixby went over to Boston to make some purchases for the affair and while there he resolved to go to the home of Roy Wallis and interview him. The money which he had received for his nefarious work in assisting Roy in his schemes was still in the bank at Annandale untouched. The burden of carrying this secret so long and not being permitted to give vent to his feelings for fear of compromising himself was upon him and destroyed much of his pleasure. He had neither seen nor heard from Roy since the terrible disaster, except what he had read in the papers or had heard through the Oaks family. He knew Roy had left the Craig Hospital and was at home; but further than that he had no knowledge of him. He found his way to Roy's beautiful home; after a ring at the door it was opened by a servant.

Bixby inquired for Mr. Wallis, saying: "Tell him, please, Mr. Charles Bixby would like to see him." He was invited in and given a seat. The servant returned shortly and ushered Bixby to the apartments of Roy. As he came into his presence he was shocked at the sight which met his gaze. Roy sat in an easy-chair

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Leaving one hand upon
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"Thank you, Mr. Wal
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"Hush, Charley, I des
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awful wrong, and I am prepared to make some restitution at least for it. I want you to accept from me the money which you gave me for my share of the work which we were engaged in; it is still in the bank at Annandale—several hundred dollars. I cannot use it; the fact of having it is a burden upon my mind. I never have spoken of my connection with the affair."

"Not to Miss Ruger?" said Roy.

"No, not even to Alice, though I have threatened to many times; but it is so long now and Elsie and Harry are happily married I never shall speak of it as it might shatter her love for me. She would lose confidence in me, I know, and she must never know it. Of course I do not lay any blame on you, Mr. Wallis. I was poor and am yet, so far as money goes, and was tempted by the opportunity to gain money. It was my first wrong; I am sorry for it. It could not be of any use now to tell it—it is a matter of past history; no one would be benefited, so I propose to keep the secret within my own breast, only making confession to the Almighty. But I want you to take the money back and use it for some good cause."

"Won't you keep it, Charley, and apply it for some good work in Winchester if you won't use it yourself?"

"No, I would rather not, it would cause comment there, if I did such a thing."

"Ah! that is so, Charley; well," said Roy, "have you the money with you?"

"No, I will send it to you, Mr. Wallis."

"All right, you may send it when you reach home and I promise to put it to some good use."

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One day about a week
he was standing in the po
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grasped the situation in an instant. He rushed out into the middle of the street, threw up his hands and cried, "Whoa! whoa!" but his loud calling seemed only to infuriate the beasts and they rushed madly by him. He sprang forward just in time and caught one of the horses by the bit and hung on with all his might. The weight of his body pulling down on the mouth of the animal had its effect, though the team carried him along swiftly a short distance. They soon slackened their speed, and finally he succeeded in putting them both in the gutter, where they came to a stop.

Bixby was completely exhausted, his clothes were torn, hands bleeding, head bare, though he looked triumphant over his success.

After the coach came to a standstill, the door opened and out jumped Harry Pendleton, unharmed, but naturally excited. His experience in the runaway in which he nearly lost his life at the time he met Elsie Oaks came vividly before his mind. He could not thank Bixby enough for practically saving his life; but poor Bixby was only too happy to have this opportunity, though he knew not who was in the coach, for he felt he owed a great debt to Harry for the wrong he had done to him.

Harry offered him a generous amount of money for his bravery, but Bixby flatly refused to accept a cent, though he was profuse in his thanks for the kind offer. "But," said he, "I felt it my duty to try and save whoever was in the coach, and it would destroy the pleasure I have in my success if I accepted money."

Harry tried to persuade him differently, but Bixby was firm in the matter.

Harry was on his way to Twin Oaks where Elsie had been spending a few days with her mother. They had returned a week or so before from their trip abroad, and he had gone to Boston to see his parents, and at the same time attend to some business matters.

The poor driver of the coach was picked up and carried into a house near where he was thrown out; though his injuries were severe, his condition was not critical.

This little bit of excitement gave a great boom to the feelings of Bixby. He felt as if he had partly repaired the evil he had been identified with, relative to Elsie, in saving Harry's life, and at the first opportunity he received great praise from Elsie for his bravery. This act on her part lifted a great load from his mind, for now he could look her in the face and not feel as guilty as before, for he realized she appreciated his risk and he felt doubly happy that the danger which he encountered was on behalf of one whom he had so deeply injured. The Winchester *Gazette*, the weekly paper of the town and the only one published there, came out in its issue that week with a splendid compliment to Charles Bixby in a few well-written lines; the author of the item was no other than Elsie, though her name did not appear.

Bixby mailed a copy to Roy Wallis, not merely in a spirit of pride over his act, yet he wanted him to know that his purpose in life was to do good whenever the opportunity afforded; this being the first occasion he

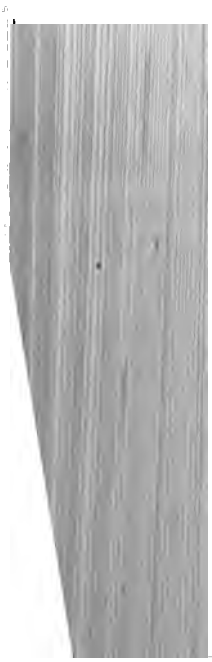
had to show his strength in that capacity, he felt as if he would like Roy to know it.

The item as read to Roy by his secretary pleased him very much, and he dictated a letter to Bixby in reply which made him feel happy indeed, for it gave him much praise for his first attempt to do good without seeking reward.

Within a week or two, Roy Wallis sent for Harry Pendleton to come to his house as he had a matter of importance to communicate to him.

Harry responded to the call the same day. He met Roy with his old-time ease, not over cordial, not coolly, but agreeably pleasant. Taking a seat beside the unfortunate blind man, he was all attention. "Harry, I have a confession to make to you and it will incriminate another; but before I make it, I want your sacred word that you will never reveal what I am to state, for first, it is past history and to make it known now would not avail anything to a soul, but to the contrary it would harm; secondly, I am compelled to give you these facts, to carry out a work which I have in view; the end will be great happiness to one you know, yes, and to more than one; have I your promise?"

Harry looked into the face of the speaker. There were no eyes to meet the gaze of his own, nothing but a pair of glasses from behind which no light or sparkle came to tell him whether there was a meaning of earnestness in what he said or not; but realizing what Roy had passed through in the last few months and already had accomplished by his acts of charity, he felt



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a kind, Christian spirit, something which I have lacked all my life, until the hand of God was placed upon me. Then, too, consider; was I not the cause of poor Charley Bixby's doing the wrong? He sent me the paper published in Winchester, *The Gazette*, that gave an account of how you nearly lost your life there a few days since in another runaway. Bixby, by endangering his life, possibly saved you from an instant death. When this brave act was read to me I was thrilled with delight at the thought that it was Bixby who stopped the horses, not knowing who was in the coach. God Almighty sent him to stop the runaways and save the one, whom so short a time before, he had played false by his connection with me and my scheme, to seek revenge. I purpose that you buy him a home in Winchester, not to exceed two thousand dollars, and I will give you a check now for the amount, as a wedding present, for his bravery in saving you from what might have been an awful death; give it in the name of yourself and wife."

Roy waited after this long talk to hear what Harry had to say. "I am astonished, Roy, at what you tell me, but I can understand it all; money often tempts men to do wrong. I can now see why Bixby was always so nervous when in my presence, poor fellow. I can forgive him for what he has done. He no doubt saved my life and that will blot out any hatred I might have for him, after hearing of his treacherous work to Elsie and me. Your motive in revealing this truth, I realize, too; it was not to impeach him, but you had to

make some explanation in making this gift which you propose. But I would rather you would make the gift in your own name than ours."

"No, no, no, Harry, I want it to come as if from you. Now please me and accept it in that way; it will only have a tendency to make him all the better in the hereafter for coming from you; I do not want to appear in the matter."

After much persuasion on the part of Roy, Harry agreed to accept the check and make the purchase of a home for the young couple, providing he could have the privilege of telling the whole story to Elsie. Roy extended him that privilege after gaining a promise never to reveal it further for Bixby's sake.

The day following the departure of Bixby and Alice on their wedding tour, Harry Pendleton and his wife drove to town and concluded the purchase of a lovely little cottage which had been built recently; they had partly made arrangements with the owner for it, but was waiting until the marriage had taken place to finish the deal. The deed of the property was made in Harry's own name and on the return of Bixby was transferred to him and his wife in this way.

Harry sent for him to call at Twin Oaks. Bixby was afraid to go, but, however, went with much fear and many misgivings; his countenance wore a troubled look which Harry could plainly see, and understand now. Bixby was fearful that he possessed some knowledge of his past, but he soon dispelled such thoughts from his mind.

"Bixby," said Harry, "Mrs. Pendleton and I wish to show our appreciation of your act of bravery a few weeks ago in risking your own life to save mine; such conduct on your part is positively worthy of some substantial remembrance. You refused to receive money at that time from me. I am glad now you did so, for it leaves us free to give you that which we hope you will enjoy more; please accept this (handing him the deed of transfer) in the name of Mrs. Pendleton and myself to Mrs. Bixby and to you. We hope this little home will bring to you much happiness, peace, and prosperity, sheltering you from the sunshine and rain alike, and when weary prove a place of rest. May God's richest blessing be added to your every work in life, that your end may be peaceful and your example worthy to follow by the posterity which you may leave."

CHAPTER XXIII.

MRS. CHADWICK'S SIN.

THE name of Mrs. Chadwick sounds a little strange perhaps to the reader, yet the individual herself is a well-known character in this story; the same spirit, the same characteristics that predominated in her life as Olive Oaks and as Mrs. Hills still were prominent.

She had been Mrs. Chadwick now nearly two years, had presided over her home to the satisfaction of her husband entirely, was easy in her manner, graceful in her ways, dignified when circumstances so required and professed much affection for him; while he was devoted to her; every wish was gratified and their home was a charming one, their company much sought after and, apparently to the outsider, there was nothing to disturb the peace and serenity of their home life.

The autumnal winds began to blow once more and filled the air with the scent of the pines of the forest. All summer long Olive found much time to visit the store of her husband and always managed to allow an opportunity to present itself for a chat with Spence, and he was ever willing to grasp such a chance.

Sometimes Van would be away on matters of business, often in the city buying goods; for now after a mercantile life of about four years he preferred to buy

the goods himself as it gave him a little change from store life, a recreation from business.

Thus Olive and Spence were thrown in each other's company. No comment was made by outsiders as she had a perfect right to be in the store, as it was her husband's, and no thought was ever given to it.

One rainy day late in the fall—a most unpleasant day, cold and raw—Van was away in the city; traffic at the store was dull; Spence felt unusually lonesome. Making an excuse to the other clerks that he had some personal affairs to look after, he left the store, going directly to Olive's home. She was not displeased to see him; on the contrary she was glad, for she too, felt gloomy; perhaps the condition of the weather affected her; she received him cordially and gave him a comfortable seat near her.

"Why this unexpected pleasure, Spence?" said Olive. "I am delighted you thought enough of me to call on such a day as this."

"Ha! ha! Olive, the weather would make no difference, I assure you, it is the opportunity I seek for. I wanted to see you alone as I have something of importance to say, and I came when I was sure you would not be interrupted by any other callers."

The color came quick and fast in her cheeks as it so often had before when her feelings were similarly aroused. She realized Spence intended to make a declaration of open love to her, while she was prepared to hear his avowal. She willingly would suit her mind to the action of the moment, permitting him to speak

the words which so long she knew were shut up in his soul, awaiting just such a time as was presented to him that hour; she tried to be calm, but her cheeks told the story of the nervousness within; they were all aglow now; her eyes too were witnesses to the truth that she regarded Spence with more than a passing fancy.

"I hope it is nothing serious, Spence, that you wish to tell me?"

"Oh! no, I presume you will not think so, Olive; I am going to leave Winchester, that is all."

Olive unconsciously jumped to her feet, exclaiming: "Going to leave Winchester? Why, Spence, what do you mean?"

Her manner gave him courage; he saw at a glance just what he hoped to, that he had awakened a deep interest in her heart in regard to him; if he had been uncertain about her feeling for him in the past, he was satisfied that she loved him now.

She stood before him and looked into his eyes with those matchless orbs of her, her form all a-tremble. Her breath came quick and fast, her bosom heaved and swelled. She was agitated all in a second at the thought of his going away. Oh! if she had only made known to him ere this just her own feelings, how in the past few months she had learned to love him! She had no right to do so; neither had she a right to love Van when she was the wife of Guy. She reasoned she could not help her feelings; her heart was so fickle.

"Going away did you say, Spence?"

"Yes, Olive, I feel that the time has come for me to

leave Winchester. I am afraid to remain here any longer."

He arose from his seat and came close to her, deliberately taking her hands in his; she did not draw them away but with flushed face and eyes sparkling, listened to what he said.

"Olive," said he, "you must be aware of my fascination for you, and have been ever since you were Mrs. Chadwick. I have tried to live it down for your husband's sake, but I cannot resist your loveliness; your eyes, your voice, your tender tones so sweet and low, have thrilled me until I can no longer remain where I can look upon your bewitching countenance; I must go away, I care not where, Olive."

"Spence, oh, Spence, do not say such harsh, cruel words; they make me so unhappy. While I have no right to listen to these burning words of love from you, yet there is an unseen power which impels me to willingly hear your declaration. For several months I have been conscious of this fact, but did not dare show it openly to you. I have tried to hide my love, Spence, but this positive acknowledgment on your part breaks the spell. No, you must not go, I cannot bear to think of it."

Oh! what a deceitful, wretched heart Olive had! Poor Van! if he could but have looked in upon the picture and beheld his sweet wife standing there in the embrace of another, one who he supposed would never betray him, much less the wife of his bosom? The long pent-up feelings of Spence gave way under the

temptation. He loved Olive and thus he cast aside all principle, giving no thought of his treachery to Van who trusted him so implicitly.

Olive's disposition was hasty and when she set her heart upon an object she carried her actions to extremes, regardless of duty. The moment she heard Spence say he was going to leave Winchester she made known just her feelings to him and seriously objected to his leaving. All the vows which she had previously made to herself were instantly broken when her fears were aroused. She possibly could have continued to hide her love if he had not mentioned going away, but the probability of his departure changed her mind in an instant and to tempt him to stay she told him what his aching heart yearned to hear from her lips.

The poor, misguided man could not forgo the pleasure of taking her in his arms and kissing her fondly. It was the first kiss of betrayal, the first for him and lo! his whole soul was awakened as from a deep sleep. The quiet, silent love which he had nourished now for two years or more had sprung from its imprisonment to open liberty and he poured forth words of love to her—words which she had no right to listen to; forgetting her own responsibilities she allowed him to speak further and plan a way out of their difficulties.

"Oh! Olive, fly with me; let us go from this place, leave Winchester, and where our love can be enjoyed."

"Please, Spence, do not tempt me to do wrong; my sin is great enough already; I cannot, I cannot," and she faintly tried to release herself from his embrace.

But he would not let her go, the fascination which his soul possessed for her knew no bounds. Her pretty eyes swam with delight as he bestowed his affection upon her. Though she was fully conscious of the unlawfulness of the act, yet it gave her happiness and self was first with her.

He pleaded with her to go with him and his constant, earnest prayers made her lose self-control.

"Oh! Spence, this is awful, I am too wicked, I——"

"Hush, my darling, don't speak so; you are simply carrying out the promptings of your heart."

"I must speak or my heart will break; you drive me to it by the love which you have aroused in my heart for you; sit down, please, Spence, and listen to what I have to say, and if you then love me as you profess to do, I will go with you anywhere, anywhere to escape this awful feeling which I have in my heart."

"First I must ask you to solemnly promise me you will not reveal to a living soul what I am about to say; as true as you do, Spence King, you will pay the penalty."

Spence saw there was a fearful earnestness in Olive's manner, yet what she had to tell was entirely unknown to him. His curiosity was deeply aroused at her strange manner; she seemed excited and tragic and a certain fear came over him, yet he gave his most sacred promise to keep her story a secret within his own heart until death.

"There is a strange fascination that impels me to love you, Olive, no matter what you have done, or may

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was too strong for her weak nature. She succumbed to the fascinations which sin had for her, and after years of this kind of life, why wonder at her final fall?

Resuming their seats, she proceeded to give Spence a brief biography of her life, her inside life, such as he was not acquainted with.

"When I married Guy Hills," said Olive, "I did so under a fearful protest from my heart and feelings. We grew up together as children, and ur union was looked upon as a foregone conclusion long before we had fully studied our own hearts. Circumstances, associations, and prospects had much to do with his growing into my life from his side of the question, while I drifted along with the general tide of lovemaking, until I gave myself to him, not unknowingly, yet not with the usual warmth of affection and eagerness which goes to make up an ideal love match. But somehow I hated him when Van came across my pathway; not at first, but later on I saw the awful mistake I had made; I did not love him. I tried to shake off this fascination, but it was impossible; my nature longed for freedom from him.

"I looked about me for a legitimate way of escape; I could find none. I felt my love for Van growing; I became desperate and resolved to plot his death despite the awful sin it was, cold-hearted and cruel.

"Oh! Spence, you will hate me; I cannot speak further. You have the influence over me now that Van held when I planned the death of poor Guy. Oh! why was I ever born to be possessed of such an evil spirit?"

"Go on, Olive; tell me the worst; my love for you cannot change; I confess it to you; there is no tide that can change it, nothing now but death or the grave can separate us," and he caught her in his arms, kissing her again and again. Her sweet smiles breaking through the undercurrent of awful devilishness did not seem to change his love for her one iota; the poor man was in a frenzy to claim her; no evil that she could ever have been a party to could unlock the chain which his fascination for her had thrown around his life.

"I would not say more, Spence, but the suffering of my conscience must have relief or my heart will break. I have never breathed all these horrible truths to a soul; but to-day there has come over me a spell which I cannot account for, alone here with my thoughts. I was in a serious mood when you came, and on your telling me you were going to leave I could not bear it, and here I have deliberately unfolded to you the inmost secrets of my heart, why, I never will know. A few weeks prior to Guy's death, I went to the city presumably to visit friends but really to buy that which would end his life; no one would ever know the truth. But my plans were changed unexpectedly. On reaching home, I found him already ill, and as he soon sank into an unconscious state, Satan tempted me in another way. I took good care to be in the sick-room alone with him as much as possible; particularly when his medicines were due. I threw them away, and the poor fellow died from the lack of proper remedies."

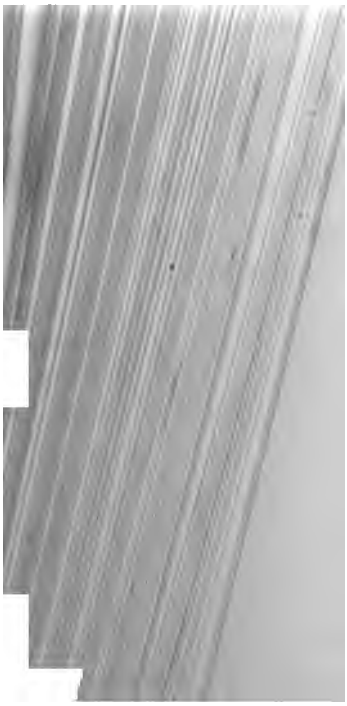
Olive was so agitated and excited from revealing

these truths that she trembled like an aspen leaf; she became almost frantic, this awful confession seemed to overwhelm her and she burst into tears. The passion of love which Spence possessed for her afforded her deep sympathy and his comforting words, despite the cause which brought her to this position, had its effect and she was able in a few moments to continue her strange and exciting tale.

"His death did not cause any suspicion to fall upon me, but how I have suffered all this time inwardly, while I was compelled to appear happy and smiling without. I was free then to allow Van to pay me court which resulted in our marriage. I have tried to be a good wife to him, but I must confess I have grown tired of his affection; he is too matter of fact; there is not enough variety in his life to please me; if I did not believe you were different, I could not love you; but I am satisfied there is an unbounded depth to your love, and thus you compel me to leave all, that my heart may find rest, for I am really unhappy surrounded with all these luxuries and good things—a home filled with every comfort, a husband whom I know is devoted to me, a fond mother and father; yet I am not satisfied."

All these terrible truths did not have any influence in lessening Spence's love for Olive. He was dumfounded though at the reality of it, yet he had allowed his affections to go so far there was no reclaiming it.

Poor Olive, all the indulgence and follies of her youth and married life had now culminated in a climax of sin. Leaving her home, and husband, would expose



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CHAPTER XXIV.

THE CLIMAX.

It is the old, old story of man's treachery and woman's duplicity. Spence and Olive had agreed to run away as soon as they could make the necessary arrangements, not realizing, apparently, the enormity of the crime; the open confession of her past life to Spence made the certainty of her going more sure than otherwise, for now she was in his power he could turn informer if she refused to carry out her promise and disgrace would surely follow. Rather than face such disaster she would fly with him to some unknown place, and when the awful facts became public she would be safe from the anger of her husband and away from the disappointment and shame which her unwise and wicked act had brought upon her many relatives and friends.

When Van returned from the city it was all quiet and serene in his household; there was no sign of the approaching cloud hovering over his home, no thought in his mind relative to the treachery that had been going on during his absence. While he was not the most innocent of men yet he had no cause to suspect Olive; her shrewdness enabled her to hide her feelings; her face bore an expression of tranquillity, completely deceiving him as to the intent of her heart. Without

any exception she was the most accomplished flirt to be found; she was a born actress; though not appearing on the public stage, she yet possessed all the art and the cunning which are characteristic to that profession.

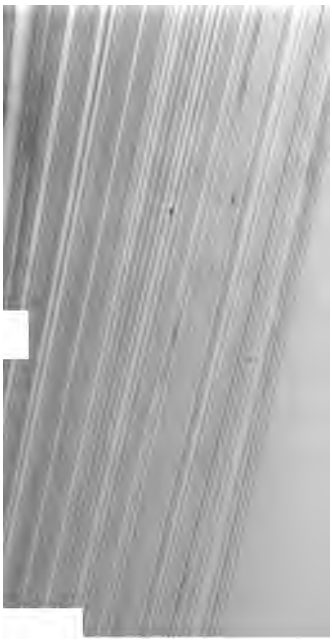
For the next few days she managed to see Spence often, and it was an easy matter for her to slip a note in his hand to give him assurance of her readiness to depart at an hour's notice; their eyes would meet; each could read the other's heart, thereby telling each other there was no weakening, but a firmer decision to go, only waiting the opportunity to get away when chance afforded. A month passed by; the cold November winds already began to howl and chilly rains were prevalent, adding drear to the unpleasantness of the situation. Fortune for the time smiled upon their unholy scheme and paved the way for the spoliation of another home. Van was called away to the city to attend the funeral of some distant relative. Olive pleaded sickness and could not accompany him; her heart beat with a strange delight when she bade him good-by; she knew then the hour of her departure with her lover was near. It was not only a good-by, but a farewell forever, for the poor unfortunate being never looked into those honest eyes of her husband's again, and if they ever meet in the world beyond the grave, it will be only through the power of God, which is able to forgive sin and blot out our transgressions.

There is no language that can express fully the surprise, the shocking surprise, that fell upon the community early the morning following the departure of

Van for the city, when it became known that Olive had run away with Spence King. People were amazed at the outrage, the boldness of the step had no parallel in the history of the social affairs of Winchester; they raised their hands in horror at the awful truth when it became an undisputed fact. The two were seen going away together under the shadow of the night; at the depot some one saw them board the train; yet nothing at that moment was thought of it because of Spence's long service in the employ of Van. He had been with him since his coming to Winchester. It was supposed he was simply acting as an escort to Olive. But when the sun arose the next morning and threw its rays upon the hush and quiet of the country town, little did its inhabitants dream of the terrible peal of thunder that would burst over them out of a clear sky. Neighbors flocked to the home of neighbors to talk of the affair with each other; one blamed Van for the indulgence he gave his wife; she was petted and spoiled, susceptible to flattery, and fell under temptation; another criticized Olive as a flirt, with a heart full of evil, declaring she had led Spence on to such a degree that the elopement was the sequel.

The two frightened clerks who were left in charge of the store could not reach Van by telegraph, because they did not have his address in the city; thus they were compelled to keep open the business, not knowing how to proceed under such circumstances, for they did not know to whom to turn to for advice.

A note which Spence left told the story in a few



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days, and the note which you have there is further evidence of their elopement."

"Oh! this is awful, awful. What will her poor mother say?"

He had hardly finished the sentence when in walked Mrs. Oaks; unfortunately she caught the last of her husband's remarks: "What is that, Oliver?" said she. Mr. Oaks, generally cool and equal to most any emergency, could not find words just then to give expression to his thoughts or reply to his wife's question. He simply bowed his head as if in prayer to invoke the aid of the Almighty. His face flushed and bore the evidence of great mental strain.

Mrs. Oaks grasped the situation in an instant; that is in so far as to know some sort of trouble was at hand. Before her stood Van's clerk with topcoat on, buttoned up, hat in hand and acting in a nervous manner.

"Oh, Oliver, tell me what is the matter?" The poor man, instead of trying to relieve the anxiety of his wife by breaking the news to her in a gentle manner, simply handed her the note, and as she read the cruel lines which told the story of Olive's downfall, she gave one loud shriek, and dropped to the floor like one dead. Mr. Oaks jumped from his position to her side in an instant, and with the help of the clerk they carried her to the sofa on the other side of the room and laid her apparently lifeless form gently down, and worked over her to bring her to consciousness.

The unusual noise brought the other members of the family to the room, servants and all. Not knowing

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chamber; earnest and anxious hearts waited to hear some word of encouragement, but despite their every effort to bring her out of the spell, she sank until the broken-hearted spirit took its flight to the land of rest, where the heartless, cruel actions of wayward children or fallen loved ones are unknown to them. Poor Mrs. Oaks was dead. Mr. Oaks was completely prostrated with grief; the loss of his dear companion under such circumstances was more than one of even his strong will could stand.

Deep pity was felt for him throughout the community and willing hands administered to his wants and relieved his suffering as far as tender care could do. What brought still deeper grief to him was the fact of his inability to attend the funeral of Mrs. Oaks; he could not leave his room, the physician strictly forbade him to enter into any excitement and keep very quiet or he, too, might follow his dear wife to the cemetery, never again to return.

Olive! Olive! if you could but look now into that dear home where once there was so much sunshine and cheer, so many ambitious hopes for a bright future for the lovely twin daughters, and see the desolation brought about by the follies of a wicked heart, by unprincipled actions and willful deeds, your conscience would surely smite you and your selfish heart would quake, under the bitter remorse.

Elsie was sent for and arrived with her husband as quickly as possible to take care of the living and assist in tenderly laying away in the tomb a fond and de-

voted mother. Her grief, too, was something terrible, but the plucky little heroine of other battles kept bravely up under the awful strain for her father's sake. Had it not been for her, death would have claimed him. Though Florence was on hand at every turn, yet she was not his own flesh and blood. Elsie was all he had left, his sweet companion was gone, and his child had fled to live a life of sin and disgrace, and surely one of loneliness and poverty, so when his own true Elsie spoke words of comfort to him and cheer, it had a good effect upon his weakened condition, and finally was one of the best means used, and restored him to partial health.

The reader wonders what has become of Van in all this excitement, no doubt. He came to town two days following the elopement and when he reached Winchester no one dare tell him around the depot of the terrible news which awaited him. He had not read a word of it as it had not become newspaper property yet, and rode up to his store in the middle of the afternoon in one of the regular village hacks. He thought it rather singular too, no one spoke to him but rather kept their distance; even the driver looked sober as he climbed upon the box and drove off toward the village from the depot.

The hack stopped in front of his store—it was closed, shades pulled down and a notice tacked on the front door, written in a bold hand: "Closed on account of the death of Mrs. Oliver Oaks." The reason Van had not received any word of this affair was because he had

been to New York to attend the funeral of a relative, and had gone to Pennsylvania with the body of the deceased in company with his cousin, and they did not know where to reach him by telegraph. As he gazed upon the closed store and the surprising notice of the death of his mother-in-law, he was greatly overcome. Turning to the driver who had not yet driven away from the front of the door, he exclaimed: "My God, man, why didn't you tell me of this? When did she die? It must have been awfully sudden; drive me at once to Twin Oaks."

The man jumped down from off his seat and by that time a number of the villagers, who saw it was Van, congregated around him and one of them extended his hand in a frank, sympathetic way and said: "Mr. Chadwick, I am awfully sorry for you and Mr. Oaks; but may God curse the two miserable beings who caused all this wretchedness."

Van looked first at one, then another of the several standing there inquiringly, as if to say what do you mean?

"Haven't you heard the awful particulars?"

"No, no, not a word, Carter, what is it? Tell me quickly," said Van stepping up close to the man who did the talking.

"Why your wife has run away with Spence King, and her mother dropped dead when she heard the news."

"What! man, don't you dare speak a word against my wife—it is a lie;" and Van clutched him by the

throat in his excitement. The crowd gathered around quickly at this strange scene and promptly released Carter from his grasp.

"Stand back, men," said Van. "I demand an explanation of Carter's accusation."

"Well! here Mr. Chadwick," said Bixby, the postmaster, who was among the crowd. "I can vouch for what Carter says."

Van was very much excited; pale and trembling, he could scarcely stand so anxious was he to learn the facts. He leaned against the hack in order to keep from falling; his eyes fairly bulged out of their sockets.

"What, Mr. Bixby, do you mean to say that Carter tells the truth?"

"Yes, Mr. Chadwick, on Tuesday morning when the boys opened the store Spence did not put in appearance as usual. Nothing was thought of it for an hour or two; but on going to his house they found he had left Winchester the night before in company with Mrs. Chadwick. Besides Walter found a note which he left stating he had fled with Olive and they did not intend to return. Her mother on hearing the news broke down and died in a short time from the shock."

"Tell me no more, Bixby, tell me no more, I cannot hear it," said Van, and he reeled and staggered; clutching at the wheel of the hack he saved himself from falling. Mr. Bixby opened the door of the carriage and assisted Van inside, and stepping in himself bade the driver to take them to Twin Oaks as fast as possible.

On the way Bixby gave Van a brief description of the awful affair; but the poor fellow scarcely heard a word he said, for his mind was terribly upset over the humiliation and disgrace which had been brought upon him by his wife's wickedness and treachery. Bixby acted the part of the good samaritan and tried to comfort him, though his efforts were in vain, for Van apparently paid no attention to his words of sympathy, but kept muttering to himself curses upon the guilty pair for their base perfidy and violation of faith. He loved Olive deeply and had every reason to believe that she responded to every feeling of his heart; how she could have been so deceptive as to carry on clandestine meetings with Spence, which she must have done to become attached to him enough to elope with him, was more than he could realize just then. And Spence; why, he thought him in love with Florence; could this all be a dream after all?

Then there came over his mind a retrospect. He remembered how Olive had met him often when Mrs. Hills, though not at his request; could she not have done the same again? "Oh! God, how I have been deceived! Olive! Olive! you have broken my heart. I can never live to face this awful disgrace." He could see her now as she used to visit his store before Guy's death; how coldly and heartlessly she spoke of her husband; how she smiled upon him and Spence too! Such was the vision which passed before him as Bixby and he were riding toward Twin Oaks, in just those few moments. His face was bowed, and covered with his

hands, but apparently his eyes opened to the fact that his wife was a wicked, designing woman, with a heart capable of the foulest treachery, regardless of the suffering, unhappiness, and disgrace that her acts brought upon them all. Thus he arrived at the house with a broken and crushed spirit, changed from a happy, high-spirited young man, full of hope and ambition, to one whose bleeding heart made him to feel the shame and ignominy caused by this sad affair.

Florence met him at the door. The weeping young woman extended her hand to give him a welcome, though a sad one. She could not speak a word but led the way to the bedchamber where lay the dead. Silently pausing there without comment for a brief period, they passed out into the hall, up one flight of stairs to the sick-room. Such a meeting as that was between Mr. Oaks and Van! Words are inadequate to express the feelings of these two; one the father, the other the husband. Indiscreet, wayward, and sinful, both loved her still. Van could not forget the fact that though she had sinned, had so cruelly forsaken him, trampled upon his love, his life and very heart, she was his wife.

The two men talked low as there was a still hush over the place, for beneath them on the floor below lay the innocent dead and within their own bodies were crushed spirits and broken hearts; their ambition was gone, hopes blasted.

The next day, the third after the elopement, Mrs. Oaks was laid away in the family tomb near Winches-

ter, with great solemnity. A very large assemblage of people came to pay their last respects to the honored dead, whose life had been one of purity and an example that any one might follow with credit.

Elsie, bereft of a fond mother, whose sunny disposition she had so generously inherited, grieved deeply over the actions of her sister Olive for bringing into their homes this awful desolation, tearing from them a loving heart, a wise counsellor, a mother and wife, one whom everybody dearly loved.

Poor Mr. Oaks—alone—poor Van deserted and forsaken; why are so many innocent people made to suffer for the wrongs of others?

CHAPTER XXV.

THE RESULT.

SPENCE KING and his guilty partner had been away now from Winchester a month or more; it was nearing the Yule-tide season when gifts are exchanged between loved ones, when hearts are made happy by the little tokens of remembrances.

It was Olive's first Christmas away from Winchester; this season of the year, like thousands of others, she looked forward to with many pleasant anticipations; all through the years of her childhood and even young womanhood the season was fraught with joy, but the time had come now when that was a thing of the past.

She had ostracized herself, dismantled herself from all rights to claim their recognition, and was shut off from every avenue of former social connections, in a land among strangers, where there was no one to pity or lend a comforting hand; they had settled in a little country place in southwestern Michigan near the border line of Indiana.

Spence had visited there when a boy some friends of his father's, in company with him, who long since had moved away; but the memories of that beautiful section of farming industry still lingered in his mind.

Not being familiar with any other land beyond his own territory they had gone there, intending to embark in some kind of business suitable to his tastes, perhaps open a store.

They had some money with them; Olive had a little at her command and Spence had saved quite an amount from his earnings while in the employ of Van. But their anticipations met with a rebuff. No sooner had they reached this place than Olive was taken ill and for nearly three weeks was compelled to keep her room; the excitement of their elopement and the facts leading up to it, with the awful calamity which followed in the death of her beloved mother, unnerved her, even one of her unprincipled nature.

Spence had secured copies of the Winchester *Gazette*, giving a full account of their departure and what followed, so that they had to bear this responsibility too in connection with their awful crime.

They were obliged to use some of their means during Olive's illness and when she had fully recovered Spence had an attack of pneumonia, very severe; for several months he was unable to leave his bed as his disease developed other complications.

Olive was faithful in watching over him, for the love and affection which he possessed for her and she for him was all that was left to her now in life; all other attractions seemed to have been cast aside by the compromising circumstances which her position had brought her to.

After a long time of continued illness, the expendi-

ture of most of their capital, the worry, the strain of watching by his bedside, her unhappy situation, regret and remorse began to tell upon her beauty; she began to age fast; the plump cheeks were growing thin, her complexion, always so rosy, was fast becoming sallow; lack of proper care and of means hastened the depreciated looks and brought about a great change in her personal appearance; so much so, no one would have recognized her after six months of such experience.

Early in June, the beginning of the season which usually brought so much happiness to Olive, when the warm rays of the sun beamed upon the earth and brought forth the returning beauties of nature, she was just beginning to pass through deep trouble; at last the end had come to her years of frivolity and fickle life. Stealing from her home with one whom she knew would bring disgrace upon her, yet she went; almost every day since she had regretted the step; but she possessed a very independent nature and a proud spirit, therefore would rather die in poverty than to return home and seek for forgiveness.

At the end of seven months of this kind of life, Spence died and his body was buried in the cemetery near the little town of Three Rivers, Michigan—with no stone to mark the resting place of a life that had gone out with such a sad ending.

Olive was quite alone now—alone with her thoughts.

Her resources had been pretty well used up by the expenses of the long illness and burial; she was without means, practically homeless and friendless. Her at

tractiveness was now only ordinary, very ordinary; there were no special marks of beauty upon her countenance; the soft, effulgent look out of her marvelous dark eyes was gone, though they still retained some of their former beauty to be sure, yet she looked haggard, pale, and was weak, discouraged, and despondent. Her thought was to put an end to her life. Her sins all crowded into her mind and forced upon her a realization of the truth; but it was too late to undo the wrongs; they never could be righted and death would be far preferable to a life of harassing memories such as her acts produced upon her.

Never a line had she written home nor heard from them save by way of the *Gazette* which Spence had subscribed to for a year, giving an assumed name, the one which she was now living under as his widow.

Oh! how she longed to look into the eyes of her dear ones at home; if she could only reduce her pride to a bit of humbleness, she might leave her present place of abode and return where she felt she could find a welcome in her father's heart, despite the cruel act of her life. But no, no, never would she yield to such sentimentality. She had cast her lot and now must make the best of it.

One morning she awoke to the fact that her money was about gone, and she would be compelled to seek her own living in some way. She left Three Rivers, going to Jackson, with the hope that, being a good-sized city, she might find some employment there, whereby she could gain a livelihood.

It cut her like a knife, as she reviewed the fact that at home in her father's house was plenty, while she was almost in suffering and want. She felt, to quote the words of the prodigal son, "How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare and I perish with hunger. I will arise and go to my father and will say unto Him, father, I have sinned against Heaven and before Thee." But her going away was different, far different from that of the prodigal son; he went from home alone and with their full knowledge; while she departed secretly, not alone—killing her fond mother by the sudden flight—leaving a dear husband to bear the shame and disgrace of her folly.

No! no! no! she could not return, but must make the best of the situation, until death relieved her and she hoped that would not be very long, for she did not feel as if she had a very great lease upon life with all her love destroyed, her affection dwarfed with poverty, and with remorse and shame before her at every turn.

In the city of Jackson she found a position as housekeeper. Though her experience was not complete in that line, yet she had quite a knowledge of the work of managing an establishment.

It was with difficulty that she kept up, the circumstances which brought her to menial work were of such a character that she tried to forget, but could not; her thoughts would travel from her work to her own home and town. She could see those pretty little shady streets of Winchester, its quiet people moving about, its churches with their tall spires reaching heavenward;

then would come before her mind that large, bold sign over the store door where she had gone in and out so many times.

"Van Courtland Chadwick, Dealer in General Merchandise."

Oh! the horrors of such a memory! Satan had led her into many paths and she had found a way out of all former difficulties, but at last she saw no light ahead. Groping her way into the darkness she worked on doing her part, guarding her secret carefully. Again her mind and thoughts would go back to the home of Guy with its pretty lawn and surroundings, then her heart would almost sink within her over the regret at her foolish step; now she realized what a beautiful character her sister Elsie had, true, faithful, satisfied with the love and affection which her husband gave her, guarding his love with sacredness, and proving to him a wife that he was proud to possess; too late—too late!

Still her pride kept her from yielding and returning to her father's house; she must end her days in drudgery to atone for the past, without even the blessing of her father; without the warm grasp of the hand of a friend. Her sins were many, her sacrifices must necessarily equal them. No one would ever know the secret shut up within her bosom, though its harsh, grating truths told upon her looks, devouring her heart like a cancer, eating out her life bit by bit. But remember, she had destroyed homes, caused hearts to break, killed one husband, disgraced another, and hastened the death of

her mother. "Was the punishment too great for her then?" No! no! she had sense enough to comprehend all these truths, bitter though they were.

Isolated, cast away, not on a barren island like Robinson Crusoe, yet the result was the same, living under another name as the widow of a man who never led her to the altar—such was her experience. Falsity, mockery, and shame had been the delight of her life, but now when the serpent coiled, when her evil life turned against her, when she sought for forgiveness, she could not find it because her proud nature still overwhelmed every other thought and left her stranded without hope or even money.

We can say now, poor Olive, as we said of Roy Wallis, when his judgment came, the calamity which had befallen him wiped out all hatred, all animosity, and suffering and sacrifice to the end of his journey was the atonement for his sins.

Olive too, now was atoning, not from her own repentance, but when the judgment of the Almighty was sent upon her she bowed to the inevitable.

CHAPTER XXVI.

FINALE.

THREE years have passed by since the events that took place in the two preceding chapters. Changes have come in and about the little village of Winchester, such as are common in life, in that period of time; Van is still there, though the unhappy ending of his married life, and so suddenly, had told upon him somewhat; his hair had turned partly gray, which only added to his good looks; his manner of life sobered to a certain degree; disappointment and chagrin and loneliness had quieted his nature, which heretofore was always bubbling over with a spirit of sociability; still he was agreeably pleasant, but much of his old-time liveliness was gone.

Oliver Oaks lived on in his beautiful home without any change. He looked considerably older, even more so than three years would naturally show upon him if he had not met with misfortune. Elsie came and went from her Boston home quite often, and made life pleasant as possible for her father. Not one of them heard from Olive; they had no idea of her whereabouts, nor of her circumstances or condition, but supposed she was living somewhere with her guilty partner.

Dr. King of Annandale had called a number of

times upon Mr. Oaks to learn if he had ever heard from them. Spence had never written a word home since his departure, and little did they all dream the poor, unfortunate fellow had been sleeping for nearly three years beneath the clods of the valley, under the shadow of evergreens in the cemetery near the western town of Three Rivers. Strange as it may seem, his resting place was not far from the home of the Woods, the father and mother of Florence, yet they were ignorant of the fact.

Florence still remained as a member of her uncle's household. After Mrs. Oaks' death she consented to remain, at least for a time, and willingly too. She had become very much attached now to the place and loved her uncle dearly, and anything she could do for him gave her much comfort and happiness, for she felt so sorry for him. His trouble too, had made him very quiet; he never could be his former self again; yet he loved his home and derived much comfort from looking after the details pertaining to its management. But when he came inside the house a feeling of dread and loneliness came over him. Then it was he needed a cheering word to take his mind off the subject which it was always bent upon, that of his poor dead wife and wayward daughter, Olive.

Van waited a few months after his wife's elopement before he applied to the courts for a divorce, which would give him a lawful release from her, though she pracically divorced herself from him in running away with Spence. During all this time he had remained

attentive to business, never going into society or sharing any benefits of social life in or about Winchester.

Now that three years have passed away he gradually entered society, much to the joy of the marriageable young women of the community. He was thought well of by all, was still young and comparatively rich, and had led an honorable life, and commanded the respect of everybody owing to his actions since the elopement of his wife. While she deserved to have no respect shown her, yet he had waited three long years hoping that she might return, and the gossipers all said he would take her back if she came; they would marry again, the past would be forgotten; but he had never intimated that such would be the case; that was only village gossip.

There were lots of nice young ladies in Winchester, yet Van did not feel as if he ought to pay attention to any of them, he a divorced man naturally must find some one who could sympathize with him in his peculiar position. There was Florence Wood, a sweet, modest woman; he always admired her and she was very friendly to him, though not a word of love had ever been spoken between them. Her position was the same as his, though the circumstances which caused the separation from her husband were far different, yet he felt neither of them was in any way to blame for their sorrow; naturally then he would turn to Florence and give her the preference of his society. He was aware, too, that this would be a delight both to Elsie and her father. While they had not spoken to him —

regard to the matter, yet they showed a preference for him by their manner, all of which he was not slow to understand.

No sooner did he begin to pay attention to Florence than the villagers began to talk. Their naturally jealous dispositions were aroused, but Van gave no heed to the echoes which he heard. He had been a resident now of Winchester a number of years and had established for himself a reputation and had placed himself upon a firm foundation for a business success.

Florence looked supremely happy when in his company; her heart had always been inclined toward him from the very first of their acquaintance, while never realizing that he would ever pay her any marked attention. When she first came to Winchester, she was in deep trouble, then one degree of misfortune followed another; Van's attention was directed elsewhere, which Florence was not long in finding out, so she had no hopes in that direction, although she had learned to admire him long before Guy Hill's death; but the secret was kept to herself. After that, she was fully aware of the attachment that existed between Van and Olive, so she buried her feelings out of sight and always showed to him a modest respect and admiration, hiding the fact of any love existing in her heart for him.

Poor Van tried hard to make a match between her and Spence; each of them knew their hearts better than he. Spence had openly avowed to Florence that he loved Olive. While she was silent as to the feelings of her heart, she had positive control over herself, thereby

conquering what others might have made a failure of. Now that she had a perfect right to love Van, though once he was the husband of her cousin, she gave him to understand by the fond looks and the gentle pressure of her hand in response to his, that her heart was susceptible to his love. Soon all formality was cast aside and they became pledged to each other, there was a righteous understanding between them, which instinct gave, words were unnecessary. The experiences which they had passed through were sufficient to pave the way for their hearts 'union.

Mr. Oaks gave his consent and added his blessing to their marriage, Mr. and Mrs. Wood united theirs, they knew the whole history of sorrow which both had undergone and felt these two lives made one, would be a happy union, that truly they would share each others' joys and sorrows and be a blessing to the community, by their noble acts of charity and generosity.

In the spring time, three years and a half after the elopement, these true hearts were united, while the warm sunlight and early showers brought to the earth its many beauties. There was no fickleness in these natures, no disposition to seek after new faces. Contented and happy in each other's love and devotion, they lived on in the beautiful home which Van owned in Winchester, amid the splendor of that rural place, religiously inclined, given to acts of charity, and they were much loved by all.

In a year or so, God blessed them in the gift of a bright baby boy, whom they called Oliver, and as the

child grew it resembled its mother. His great uncle, Oliver Oaks, was proud of the little fellow; it gave him much delight to take the child on his knee and look into his pretty eyes, listen to its prattle and babyish talk. He was the only child in the family, and consequently highly favored, not alone with the love and affection bestowed, but he would share quite a large fortune later on, that would enable him to live in luxury. Elsie, too, was happily situated in a beautiful home in the city of Boston, with a most devoted husband. Thus with his niece, Florence, near him, happy in her love for Van, Mr. Oaks' declining years were full of peace. His life and times had been crowded with many exciting scenes and incidents, and now as he was traveling down the shady side of life, he could look back over his career with no feeling of regret in as far as his duty was concerned. He had been a devoted man to his family, a good citizen, and a kind neighbor. While his present days were passing away quietly, he would have been much happier if he could have known where Olive was, whether she was in want or suffering, yet he left her to the care of the Almighty, hoping, trusting, and praying that He would watch over her, forgive her, and when she came down to the river of death, whether it be sooner or later, that she might have made her peace with Him, and cross over to the eternal shore—forgiven.

THE END.

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